# Muskie School of Public Service

**Supported Employment in Maine:**
**Youth in Foster Care**

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## Executive Summary

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth, 2006) describes five "Guideposts for Success," for youth in foster care. The guideposts include:

1. School-based preparatory experiences
2. Career preparation and work-based learning experiences
3. Youth Development and Leadership
4. Connecting activities
5. Family involvement and supports

This study focuses on career preparation and work-based learning experiences. The report includes policy recommendations for system stakeholders including Departments of Health and Human Services, Departments of Labor, and providers of supported employment services. A comprehensive literature review is included as an appendix to this report.

This report describes the employment experiences of 35 Maine youth in foster care. The study methods used included a quantitative analysis of the employment experiences of youth in care and a qualitative component that included interviews with five youth from the sample and four adults (a program job coach, a vocational case manager, a foster/adoptive parent, and a representative from a First Jobs business partner). The study attempts to answer four research questions:

1. What are the real or apparent mental and physical disabilities that are present in youth involved in First Jobs?

2. What are the overall job readiness, work ethic, work skills and knowledge, and other positive and negative issues related to employment?

3. What are the characteristics and issues unique to foster care and transition from foster care that impact employment outcomes?

4. What are the types of job experience and work skill learning settings, employer and service provider practices, or other factors related to successful connections with a job and career path?

The 35 youth in the sample range in age from 15-22 years, and have disability profiles ranging from no documented disabilities, (n=12, 24%) to four types of disability (n=1, 3%). Twenty-three (66%) of the youth have at least one disability, with learning disability/cognitive disability being the most common disability type (n=19, 54%).

The summer jobs program represented the first employment experience for the majority of sample youth (n=24, 69%). Eleven youth (31%) had prior job experience. One third of sample youth, (n=12, 34%) were below expected grade level in school at the time of their enrollment in the employment program.

All of the youth experienced a job placement, and received job-coaching support. Using case record narrative data the research team established three levels of job-coaching

support, Minimal, (n=11; 31%), Moderate, (n=15; 43%), and Intensive, (n=9; 26%). The research team also developed four measures of job success from the case narratives:

Connection to positive peers at work
Connection to an adult (not job coach) at work
Employee offered continuing employment after the end of First Jobs
Overall employee review

These success measures are fully described in the measures section of the report. Generally, the employment experiences of sample youth were very positive. Over two-thirds of sample youth, (n=24; 69%), made a connection with positive peers at work, nearly three-quarters of sample members, (n=25; 71%), made a connection to an adult other than their job coach at work, and just under two-thirds of sample youth, (n=22; 63%), received offers of continued employment after the conclusion of the summer employment program. Looking at the fourth measure of employment success, nearly three quarters of sample youth, (n=25; 71%), received Excellent or Very Good overall employee reviews.

The qualitative analysis results from the 5 youth in care and 4 adults who work with the youth provide additional insight into the work experiences of youth in care who work in a supported employment environment. Commenting on work-readiness issues the employer representative interviewed for the project noted that: "*First Jobs youth have a longer "learning curve," in terms of dependability, accountability and social skills."* Three of the five youth interviewed reported needing workplace accommodations in order to work; two of these youth specified the need for job coach support.

Three of the five interview youth reported no particular challenges related to foster care. Two youth identified issues unique to foster care, one mentioned the stigma of being a youth in foster care and the second noted that youth in foster care receive less financial and emotional support than non-foster children. It is important to note that the three youth who reported no challenges resided in long-term, stable placements.

Based on the information in the literature review and the findings from the employment program review, the research team developed the six recommendations listed below.

**1. Champion networking opportunities to help youth achieve employment success.**

Youth in foster care typically have lower rates of employment than general population youth. Targeted early employment supports for youth in foster care can provide them with levels of support and levels of employment similar to those of general population youth. Youth aged 15-16 should be primary targets for supported early employment opportunities.

**2. Cultivate business partnerships with employers:**

The importance of the relationship between employers and employment service providers cannot be overemphasized. The more successful an employment service agency is at cultivating this key relationship, the greater the likelihood that youth will have successful

employment experiences. One way employment support agencies cultivate this relationship is by learning each company's business culture and language, and then using that knowledge to create mutually beneficial arrangements between the employer and the employees the agency places.

**3. Use targeted employment specialists to support youth employment.**

Employment specialists can play several valuable roles for youth in foster care regardless of disability status. The employment specialist is an adult who plays a major supportive role focused on helping the youth explore career options, find employment, and through their supporting role at the job site help the youth learn about job responsibilities and employer expectations.

**4. All systems that provide services and supports to the youth need to be involved in transition work.**

The "interconnectedness" of the systems provides a wide variety of potential supports for youth, which could improve the probability of positive outcomes. Employment specialists work with and within this broader system, playing the role of services broker between key players. Employment specialist roles include: recruiting/encouraging youth through home visits; finding the route through the available supports (public and private) to help youth succeed in employment; exploring available supports at the individual level; employment specialists also broker employment opportunities through private employers.

**5. Develop objective benchmarks for employment success.**

Case narratives defined success very broadly as the completion of the summer employment program. The research team developed four quantifiable measures of success from the case record narratives (Connection to positive peers at work, Connection to an adult (not job coach at work), Employee offered continuing employment after program completion and Overall employee review). These measures could objectively and reliably measure success of the placement in a multi-dimensional way both throughout the program and at the end of completion of the program. Minimally a baseline and post-program data collection will be necessary to mark change.

**6. Future research using larger samples and program evaluation protocols designed in conjunction with supported employment providers.**

Research with larger samples and program evaluation protocols designed with input from providers will yield a more thorough understanding of the supports that contribute to successful early employment experiences for youth in foster care who also have disabilities. An evaluation protocol designed in conjunction with supported employment program staff and the agencies that refer youth to the supported employment program would provide a number of benefits including: collection of data that includes factors known to influence transition success for youth in foster care and for youth with disabilities; collection of data that includes variables associated with employment success; the potential to analyze larger samples either by looking at multiple programs or by examining a single program across a number of years.

# Background

## Purpose Statement

The transition from youth to adulthood is challenging for any young teen, and navigating the often-arduous path to emotional, physical, and financial independence requires the development of many essential life skills. These life skills, along with critical external support systems, enable youth to travel more easily along the journey to independent adulthood. Research shows, however, that not all youth enter this challenging transitional period with the same set of life skills or the same access to important support systems. One subset of youth, youth with disabilities, encounters many unique barriers that make this transition particularly complex. These barriers can be even further exacerbated if a youth with disabilities is also in foster care. The focus of this study is on the first employment experiences of a group of youth in foster care who have disabilities.

## Literature Review

### *Youth with Disabilities*

Several reliable sources exist for national data on youth with disabilities, including U.S. Census data and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2). The 2000 U.S. Census reports that overall, 19.2 percent[1] of Americans aged five and over have a sensory, physical, mental, or self-care disability. Census data indicates that Maine has a slightly higher percentage (20.0% to 19.3%) of citizens, aged five and over, with disabilities than the United States as a whole. Young people aged 5-20 make up the smallest subset of disabled persons in Maine, 24,991 (9%). Overall, 54.4 percent of Maine citizens with disabilities aged 16-64 are employed, slightly less than the comparable rate of 55.8 percent for the general population in the United States.

The NLTS-2 provides data on youth with disabilities, but it also includes data on education and employment. The 2003 NLTS-2 survey shows that 70 percent of disabled youth had completed high school, 32 percent had some form of postsecondary education participation, 70 percent had worked for pay since leaving high school, and 49 percent were working at the time of the survey.

Murray et al. (2003) studied the effects a disability can have on youths' educational experiences. They studied two cohorts of high school graduates including youth with and without learning disabilities from three large school districts in the northwestern United States. Murray reported that compared to non-disabled students, youth with learning disabilities were more than four times as likely (37% vs. 9%) to have not attended any

[1] Even the U.S. Census Bureau can only estimate the number of people with disabilities in the United States. Stern (2003) in a limited review article distributed by the U.S. Census Bureau notes that, "According to Census 2000, 48.9 million people 5 years old and over living in housing units [i.e. noninstitutionalized] had a disability. This represents 19.2 percent of that population. The Census 2000 Supplemental Survey (C2SS) …estimated that 39.7 million people aged 5 and over living in housing units (15.6 percent) had a disability." This review uses the higher figure generated by Census 2000.

postsecondary education. Youth with learning disabilities were also nearly seven times less likely (9% vs. 62%) to have attended a four-year college.

In addition to educational barriers, youth with disabilities also often experience employment barriers. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) note that one to two years after leaving school, youth with disabilities had a 46 percent employment rate, significantly lower that that of peers without disabilities (59%). Although almost 80 percent of Americans with disabilities report a preference for working, approximately 76 percent remain unemployed (Schall, 1998). People with disabilities often experience career patterns consisting of a series of entry-level positions interspersed with extended periods of unemployment (Roessler and Bolton, 1985). Scholars have various explanations for these startling statistics. Factors that may contribute to this high rate of unemployment among the disabled including: discrimination (employment and social), logistical issues (transportation and means of communication), access to the job market, and employer assumptions about the abilities of youth with disabilities (Hagner et al.1996).

### *Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care*

Determining the prevalence of disabilities among children and youth in foster care is difficult. One possible measure, reported by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth, 2005) uses enrollment in special education as a proxy for disability. Using this measure NCWD/Youth reported, "Of the more than 500,000 children in foster care, 30 to 40 percent are also in special education," (p. 2). Another estimate indicates that 30 percent and 50 percent of children in foster care are placed in special education compared with 12 percent of the general school population (Hunt & Marshall, 2002). These data indicate that youth in foster care are significantly over-represented in special education.

A youth with a disability who is also in foster care often faces additional educational achievement barriers beyond those described for youth with disabilities. Examining a sample of high school aged youth in out-of home care in Chicago, Courtney et al. (2004) reported that the average reading level for youth completing grade 10 or 11 was grade seven. Youth in care were 1.6 times more likely to be classified as learning disabled and nine times as likely to be classified with an emotional/behavioral disability. Youth in care were also nearly three times as likely as other Chicago public school youth to be classified with another type of disability.

Looking at issues of school success in a large urban school district in Oregon, Geenan and Powers (2005) compared the educational achievement of four groups of youth: youth who were in foster care and special education, youth in foster care only, youth in general education, and youth in special education. Compared to youth in foster care only, youth in foster care and special education had lower scores on state tests, were more likely to be exempted from state testing, and had more instability in foster care placement. Compared to the youth in general education, youth in both foster care and special education had lower grade point averages, earned fewer credits toward graduation, changed schools more frequently, scored lower on state tests, and were more likely to be exempted from state testing. Compared to youth in special education only, youth in foster care with disabilities

changed schools more frequently and were more likely to be in a segregated special education classes.

A study of 134 Maine youth in foster care, aged 14-21 indicated that 28 percent of the youth reported 6 or more placements since entering care, 35 percent of the youth reported 4 or more school changes related to foster care placements, 31 percent were at least one year behind the expected grade level based on their age, 41 percent received special education services, and 75 percent reported a desire to attend college (Zanghi, et al. 1999).

### *Youth in foster care and Employment*

Employment data for foster care or former youth in foster care rarely focus on youth with disabilities as a distinct group. The National Evaluation of the Title IV-E Independent Living Program compared the outcomes of youth emancipating from foster care with an identified disability (47%) to non-disabled youth emancipating from foster care. The authors found that foster youth with disabilities were less likely to be employed, be high school graduates, have social support, and be self-sufficient (Westat, 1991).

Courtney and Dworsky (2005) compared 603 youth in care aged 19 years (study group) to a sample of 19 year olds from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (comparison group). The authors found that only 40 percent of the young adults in study group were currently employed, considerably less that the 58 percent of the 19 year olds in the comparison group. In a similar study Parrish et al. (2001) noted that youth in foster care are twice as likely as general population youth to leave school without obtaining a diploma.

Another examination of the data by Courtney et al. (2005) found that youth aging out of foster care faced a wide spectrum of barriers including not being enrolled in an education or training program (63%), unemployment (60%), not having enough to eat (25%), low earnings (76% earned less than $5,000 a year and 90% earned less than 10,000 a year), and homelessness (14%). Nearly half of the females were pregnant by age 19, and were twice as likely as general population females to have at least one child. Thirty-three percent had been arrested in the last year and 24 percent had spent at least one night in a correctional facility. A similar study by Dworsky (2005) found that nearly 17 percent of the former foster youth were recipients of public assistance and nearly a third were food stamp recipients in at least one of the eight quarters after their discharge. In addition to these problems, Kerker and Morrison (2006) state that youth in foster care face a number of serious barriers to receiving needed mental health services. In summary, youth with disabilities in foster care face significant barriers to successfully transitioning to adulthood.

### *Predictors of success for Youth in foster care*

Siegel and Gaylord-Ross (1991) created a four-factor model to explain job success among youth with learning disabilities. The four factors include: job match and accommodation, social acceptance, work attitude, and special services. Raskind, et al. (1999) completed a twenty-year longitudinal study examining employment outcomes for a sample of learning disabled youth and young adults. The authors identified a set of "success attributes," that

include realistic adaptation to life events, greater self awareness/self acceptance of the learning disability, proactivity, perseverance, emotional stability, appropriate goal setting, and the presence and use of effective support systems. These "success attributes" accounted for nearly 75 percent of the variance in the successful/unsuccessful variable. The "success attributes" were more powerful predictors of success than other measures including IQ, academic achievement, life stressors, age, gender, and ethnicity. The success attributes were stable at both the 10-year and 20-year follow-up points, indicating stability across time.

Courtney and Dworsky (2005) reported that, "A desire to attend college, closeness to at least one family member and general satisfaction with their experiences in out-of-home care increased the likelihood of employment or education for these young people," (p. 13). A number of authors (Murray, 2003; Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Miller, 1996; Bernard, 1993; Moskovitz, 1983) focus on evidence of resilience as a predictor for successful outcomes for transitioning young adults with disabilities. Murray (2003) lists a number of protective factors associated with resilient youth, such as positive temperament, internal locus of control, high self-esteem, positive outlook on the future, moderate to high intelligence, emotionally supportive and warm relationships with at least one parent, access to quality schools, feeling a sense of school belonging, good peer relationships, social support from adults, and involvement in other pro-social organizations.

The National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth, 2005) also examined factors related to success for youth in foster care transitioning to adulthood independence. They characterize a successful transition as having a connection to family, peers and caring adults, completion of age appropriate education levels, living in a stable and safe environment, having the opportunity for career exploration, employment and social and civic engagement, and an understanding of how to manage financial assets.

In summary, predictors for successful transition to adulthood include: appropriate job match and accommodations; proactivity, perseverance, high self-esteem; relatively high intelligence/academic ability; positive and supportive school connections; supportive relationships with parents/caring adults; employment and career exploration during high school; positive social connections within their community.

### *Promising Practices*

Research shows that youth who have left foster care are more likely than those in the general population to not finish high school, to be unemployed, to be dependent on public assistance, and to have higher than average prevalence of mental health problems, drug use and involvement with the criminal justice system (Courtney, et al., 2004; Pecora, et al., 2005).

Friend, et al. (2001) offers seven recommendations to support gainful employment for transitioning youth including: 1) assist youth in identification of natural skills and abilities; 2) encourage career exploration through experience; 3) support development of job readiness training and employment skills; 4) work with job placement agencies and assist

youth with job coaching; 5) provide preparation and training in non-traditional careers for young women; teach youth how to save money and accumulate assets; 6) and develop employment-based collaborations between business, social service, education and employment agencies (i.e. internships, volunteer opportunities and paid employment.

Carter and Lunsford (2005) identify four skill sets that need to be addressed: 1) Social skills training linked directly to students social skills deficits; 2) Vocational skills training focused on employment skills development and supported employment placements facilitating the connection between workplace expectations and skills learned at school; 3) Academic skills taught through a program integrated with vocational education; 4) Self-determination skills including setting realistic employment goals, evaluating progress toward self-selected goals, advocating for opportunities and supports and accepting responsibility for one's actions. The authors asserted the need to combine training in these skills with additional supports including community linkages, workplace supports, and student and family involvement in the transition planning process (pp. 65-66).

Partee (2003) examined the five leading Youth Development Programs (Job Corps, National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, STRIVE, YouthBuild, and Youth Service and Conservation Corps) in the United States and identified the common characteristics of these programs. These programs include: 1) A broad set of strategies and services to address the needs of the target population; 2) Some form of on-site social service programs (case management, counseling, crisis intervention, information and referrals); 3) Inclusion of work appreciation values, incorporation of work readiness skills and authentic work-based experiences; 4) A structure and environment to build participant confidence, skills and value as a productive individual and participating citizen; 5) An organizational structure in place for managing, replicating and guaranteeing adherence to the goals, objectives and standards of the program (pp. 2-3).

Ohtake and Chadsey (2003) described job coaching strategies that utilize natural supports emphasizing leadership roles for coworkers and more consulting or facilitator roles for job coaches. The authors describe a continuum of six types of facilitation strategies involving coworkers and job coaches: autonomous support by coworkers, suggested support from job coaches to coworkers, managed support of coworkers by job coaches, instructional support by coworkers, direct training by job coaches with consultation from coworkers, and direct training by job coaches.

### *First Jobs Description*

First Jobs features both on-site and off-site job coaching support to youth in care. Job coaches are pre-trained in the specific jobs and in the specific industries where First Jobs youth are employed. First Jobs has a sector-based approach and works with multiple industries to respond to their entry-level staffing needs. Job Coaches provide on-site support to help youth develop inter-personal skills required on the job, and often provide supplemental training and support to accommodate the longer learning curves and adjustment periods most First Jobs youth require.

First Jobs provides a number of employability development activities. Activities include job shadowing prior to job placement, supporting youth in thinking about life skills and preparing for work and entry-level job decision-making. Formal workshops include a number of business partners as guest faculty. Guest faculty provides training in job acquisition and retention skills development, life-skills management, and financial literacy training.

First Jobs also provides ongoing vocational counseling and worksite reinforcement of skills acquired in the more formal classroom trainings. The integration of all social service organizations and family inclusion is critical to the success of First Jobs. Agencies are asked to be "at the table" early in the referral and job placement process to identify resources that can enhance the young job seekers likelihood of employment success. This inclusive process helps to identify other organizations that may be in a position to provide critical and complementary services for youth who meet First job's eligibility guidelines. The engagement of family members, who may be adoptive parents, foster parents or group home providers, is vital to the success of First Jobs candidates. Family resources are identified, included and used as supports throughout the First Jobs candidate's initial employment experience.

The study presented below focuses on employment, through looking at a snapshot of the early employment experiences of 35 youth in foster care ranging in age from 15-22 years old. Using the existing literature outlined above, case record reviews and qualitative interviews with 5 of the youth and 4 of the key adults, we hope to answer the following research questions:

*1. What are the real or apparent mental and physical disabilities that are present in youth involved in First Jobs?*

*2. What are the overall job readiness, work ethic, work skills and knowledge, and other positive and negative issues related to employment?*

*3. What are the characteristics and issues <u>unique</u> to foster care and transition from foster care that impact employment outcomes?*

*4. What are the types of job experience and work skill learning settings, employer and service provider practices, or other factors related to successful connections with a job and career path?*

# Methods

**Design**
The study involved two major components, a literature review of issues that effect employment outcomes for youth in foster care transitioning to adulthood and a cross-sectional study of a sample of 35 Maine youth in foster care aged 15-22 who participated in a supported employment program during the summer of 2004 or 2005. The cross-sectional study consisted of a comprehensive review of case records from the supported employment program and semi-structured interviews with five sample members and semi-structured interviews with four adults involved with the youth. A comprehensive literature review, the data collection tool and the interview questionnaires are included as appendices.

**Sample**
The case record review sample consists of 35 Maine youth in foster care aged 15-22 who participated in a supported employment program during the summer of 2004 or 2005. Five youth participated in interviews with project staff; four adults involved with the youth also participated in project interviews.

Youth participated in the First Jobs Summer Jobs Initiative. The Summer Jobs Initiative places disabled youth and young adults aging out of the foster care system in fixed length entry-level employment positions with a number of invested employers (business partners) who have recurring seasonal needs for fixed length entry-level employees. The business partners are carefully recruited and complete a detailed relationship building process that identifies opportunity areas for early occupational experiences for youth and also cultivates and enriches the environment/work setting to provide maximum learning experiences for First Jobs youth.

**Procedure**
The cross-sectional study involved two components. First, we conducted a detailed review of the employment program case records of 35 youth who participated in First Jobs during the summer of 2004 or 2005. The data from the record review were entered into a database and statistically analyzed.

To supplement the findings of the case record review, we conducted interviews with five youth, and four key adults involved with the youth (a program job coach, a vocational case manager, a foster/adoptive parent and a First Jobs business partner).

**Measures**
The case record review used a number of measures to help describe youth and their employment experiences. Table 1 contains the measures used in the case record review. The table is divided into independent and dependent variables. Each variable is named in column one, column two describes the variable and column three shows how the variable was coded for analysis.

The independent and dependent variables in Table 1 were collected directly from client case records quantitative and narrative sections.

**Table 1. Variable Definitions and Coding Scheme**

| Variable | Description | Coding |
|---|---|---|
| **Independent variables** | | |
| Age | Continuous variable indicating age at time of program enrollment | |
| Gender | Dummy variable indicating gender of participant | 1=Female; 0=Male |
| Ethnicity | Categorical variable indicating race/ethnicity | |
| Disability Present | Dummy variable indicating presence of disability | 1=yes; 0=no |
| Number of Disabilities | Categorical variable indicating number of disabilities | 0=0; 1=1; 2=≥ 2 |
| Disability type | Set of dummy variables indicating disability type<br><br>LD/C[2] = Learning disability/cognitive disability<br><br>MH/EB = Mental health disability/Emotional behavioral disability | **Mental (LD/C)** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Mental (MH/EB)** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Physical Disability** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Sensory Disability** 1=yes; 0=no |
| Grade Level | Continuous variable indicating grade level at time of program enrollment | |
| Placement type | Set of dummy variables indicating participant placement type (Reference group is group home) | **Foster Home** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Group Home** 1=yes; 0=no |
| Services received | Set of dummy variables indicating employment preparation/support services received | **Job acquisition skills training** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Vocational evaluation/testing** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Career assessment** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Career counseling** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Job retention skills training** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Site visits** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Job shadowing** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Job placement** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Job coaching** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**On-site work assessment** 1=yes; 0=no |
| Job coaching support level | Categorical variable assigning level of job coaching support | 1= Intensive; 2 = Moderate; 3 = Minimal<br>(Intensive= coach present 75% or more of the time; Moderate= coach present 25- 74%; Minimal=coach checks in to 24% of time) |
| **Dependent Variables** | **Description** | **Coding** |
| Employment outcomes | Set of dummy variables indicating client success in job placement | **Connection w/positive peers at work** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Connection to adult (not job coach) at work** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Offered continuing employment after end of First Jobs Program** 1=yes; 0=no<br>**Overall Employee Review** 1=Excellent/Very good; 0=Fair-Terminated |

[2] The recoding is based on the premise that both learning disabilities and cognitive disabilities involve information processing while mental health and emotional behavioral disabilities are combined as manifestations of Emotional Disturbance as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, CFR 34 §300.7 (c) (4) (i)).

The narrative section of the youths' case records provided data for the creation of a set of variables that provide perspective on individual youth's job experiences. The research team considered the offer of continued employment the ultimate measure of job success; the offer of continuing employment indicated the employer was willing to continue to employ the sample member after the end of the summer job program. Three of the four job outcomes (connection to positive peers at work, connection to an adult at work other than job coach, offered continued employment after the end of the *First Jobs* program) are subjective; in instances of disagreement the researchers discussed the case in question until they reached consensus. The case record review revealed four outcomes related to job success:

- Connection to positive peers at work
- Connection to an adult (not job coach) at work
- Employee offered continuing employment after the end of First Jobs
- Overall Employee Performance Review score.

# Results

### Demographics

Table 2 lists the demographic distribution of the sample. Youth are nearly evenly divided by gender with 18 males (51%) and 17 females (49%). The average age for sample youth is 17.1 with a median age of 17. The youth range in age from 15-22 years, the two largest groups are 16 (10, 29%) and 17 (10, 29%) year olds. Nearly three-quarters of the youth race/ethnicity data were missing from their case records. Of those whose race/ethnicity could be determined, the majority, (n=7; 78%), are white, one youth (11%) is Black/African-American and one youth (11%) is multiracial. Seventeen youth (49%) resided in foster home placements, the remaining 18 sample members (51%) live in group homes or independent living situations.

**Table 2. Sample Demographics (N=35)**

| Gender FC Youth | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|
| Male | 18 (51%) |
| Female | 17 (49%) |
| **Age FC Youth** | **Frequency (%)** |
| 15 | 3 (9%) |
| 16 | 10 29%) |
| 17 | 10 (29%) |
| 18 | 5 (14%) |
| 19 | 6 (17%) |
| 22 | 1 (3%) |
| **Ethnicity FC Youth** | **Frequency (%)** |
| White | 7 (20%) |
| Black/African American | 1 (3%) |
| Two or more races | 1 (3%) |
| Missing | 26 (74%) |
| **Placement Type** | **Frequency (%)** |
| Foster Home | 17 (49%) |
| Group Home/Independent Living | 18 (51%) |

Table 3 lists the distribution of disability status for the youth. All youth had a disability that was of the mental type. The most common type of mental disability is Learning Disability/Cognitive (n=19; (27%). Sixteen youth (24%) had a Mental Health/Emotional-Behavioral disability. Seven youth (16%) had a physical disability and 3 youth (9%) had a sensory (vision) disability.

**Table 3. Disability Status Distribution (N=35)**

| Disability Type | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|
| *Mental (total)* | *35 (100%)* |
| Leaning Disability/Cognitive | 19 (54%) |
| Mental health/Emotional-Behavioral | 16 (46%) |
| *Physical/Sensory (total)* | *10 (29%)* |
| Physical | 7 (20%) |
| Sensory - Vision | 3 (9%) |

All of the youth participated in a job placement and received job coach support. Each youth received job coach support; however youth received varying levels of support. Table 4 lists the distribution of the job coaching support levels.

**Table 4. Job Coaching Support Level (N=35)**

| Support Level | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|
| Intensive | 9 (26%) |
| Moderate | 15 (43%) |
| Minimal | 11 (31%) |

Table 5 offers a perspective on the three outcome measures for youths' job experiences. Two of these outcomes, connections to positive peers and adult connections, are identified in the literature as important supports for youth transition success. Overall, youths' work experiences were quite positive. Over two thirds, 24 (69%), of the youth made a connection with positive peers at work, nearly three-quarters, 25 (71%), made a connection with an adult other than their job coach at work. Finally, nearly two-thirds of sample youth, 22 (63%), were offered continued employment after the conclusion of the summer program. Table 5 summarizes these three employment outcomes.

**Table 5. Employment Outcomes (N=35)**

| Employment Outcomes | Yes (%) | No (%) | Missing (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Connection w/positive peers at work | 24 (69%) | 7 (20%) | 4 (11%) |
| Connection to adult (not job coach) at work | 25 (71%) | 6 (17%) | 4 (11%) |
| Employee offered continuing employment after the end of First Jobs* | 22 (63%) | 13 (37%) | 0 |

*Some youth were offered continued employment but declined in order to concentrate on school or school activities, several youth worked seasonal jobs and while not offered continuing employment were invited back for the following season. All youth in these categories were counted as being offered continuing employment.

Table 6 lists the distribution of the Overall Employee review rating for the youth. Twenty-five of the youth had a rating of Excellent/Very Good (71%), and eight youth had a rating of Fair/Terminated (23%).

**Table 6. Overall Employee Review (N=35)**

| Overall Employee Review | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|
| Excellent/Very Good | 25 (76%) |
| Fair-Terminated | 8 (24%) |

***Question 1: What are the real or apparent mental and physical disabilities that are present in youth involved in First Jobs?***

Case record review data indicates that 23 (66%) of the youth have at least one disability. Table 7 shows the disability status distribution. Table 7 displays *documented* disability data; it is important to remember that sample youth can also face significant barriers not related to documented disabilities. Table 7 also presents a profile of the number of disabilities affecting sample youth. The number of disabilities for sample youth ranges from 0-5 with a mean of two disabilities; the median number of disabilities for the group is also two. The third section of Table 7 displays the types of disabilities that are documented in the case records. The most frequent disability is a learning disability (LD), 12 (27%), followed by a mental health disability, 11 (24%).

**Table 7. Distribution of Youth Disability Status (N=35)**

| Disability Count | Disability (%) | No Disability (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Disability Yes/No | 23 (67%) | 12 (33%) |
| Total | 35 | 100% |
| **Number of Disabilities** | **Frequency** | **%** |
| - | Mean = 2 | Median = 2 |
| 0 | 12 | 34% |
| 1 | 8 | 23% |
| 2 | 10 | 29% |
| 3 | 3 | 9% |
| 4 | 1 | 3% |
| 5 | 1 | 3% |
| Total | 35 | 100% |
| **Disability Type** | **Frequency** | **%** |
| *Mental (total)* | *35* | *78%* |
| Leaning Disability/Cognitive | 19 | 54% |
| Mental health-Emotional/Behavioral | 16 | 46% |
| *Physical/Sensory (total)* | *10* | *22%* |
| Physical | 7 | 16% |
| Sensory - Vision | 3 | 7% |
| Total* | 45 | 100% |

* Total includes youth with multiple disabilities

The five youth interviewed for this study represented a range of disabilities. Two of the youth have cognitive disabilities, one youth has a severe visual impairment and a fourth youth has a non-verbal learning disability, which seems to have little impact on his/her day-to-day life. The fifth youth has a mental health disability (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and bi-polar disorder).

Three of the youth reported that they need workplace accommodations to mitigate the effects of their disabilities. Two youth stated that they need a job coach: one youth specified a need for full-time job coach support; the second youth did not specify the level of support s/he needs. The third youth specified a need for large print materials to accommodate a visual impairment; this youth also stated that due to the visual impairment, "*I can only work certain jobs."*

The four adults interviewed for this study each play a different support role for the youth they are involved with. While no questions in the interview protocol specifically addressed the impact of a youth's disability(s), the discussion of barriers to reaching long-term career goals touched on youth disabilities in two of the four interviews. One adult said that "*Recurring health problems, needs to stay on medication to help with anxiety and depression. Needs to stay in therapy and stay on track."* The other adult stated "*Disability is just too severe, will always need job coaching support. Someday may be able to live at an assisted living facility (a step up in independence from current adult group home placement)."*

### *Question 2. What are the overall job readiness, work ethic, work skills and knowledge, and other positive and negative issues related to employment?*

Table 8 presents data on the grade level of sample youth when they entered their employment program. Grade 0 indicates that a youth dropped out of school, this occurred in two cases (6%) among sample youth. The sample includes a large number of 9$^{th}$ grade youth, 10 (29%), entered the program when they were in the 9$^{th}$ grade. Grade 13 refers to youth who have completed high school or obtained a Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED).

**Table 8. Grade at Enrollment (N=35)**

| Grade at Enrollment | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|
| 0 | 2 (6%) |
| 9 | 10 (29%) |
| 10 | 8 (23%) |
| 11 | 5 (14%) |
| 12 | 5 (14%) |
| 13 | 5 (14%) |
| Missing | 0 |

Table 8a compares age at program enrollment to grade level at enrollment. This allows us to determine whether sample youth are at a grade level appropriate to their age. Twelve (34%) of the youth are below expected school grade level for their ages. The following age ranges to determined appropriate grade level:

- Grade 9 Ages 14-15
- Grade 10 Ages 15-16
- Grade 11 Ages 16-17
- Grade 12 Ages 17-18

**Table 8a. Age at Enrollment * Grade at Enrollment**

| | Grade at enrollment | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Enrollment age** | **0 (%)** | **9 (%)** | **10 (%)** | **11 (%)** | **12 (%)** | **13 (%)** | **Total** |
| 15 | 0 | 0 | 3 (100%) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 (100%) |
| 16 | 0 | 7 (70%) | 3 (30%) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 (100%) |
| 17 | 0 | 0 | 4 (40%) | 3 (30%) | 1 (10%) | 2 (13%) | 10 (100%) |
| 18 | 1 (20%) | 0 | 0 | 1 (20%) | 3 (60%) | 0 | 5 (100%) |
| 19 | 1 (25%) | 0 | 1 (25%) | 0 | 0 | 2 (50%) | 4 (100%) |
| 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 (100%) | 1 (100%) |

Several questions in the youth interview protocol addressed the issue of transition from foster care. Asked to think about the challenges of transitioning from foster care to school or work, youth offered the challenges they face, for example: "*Brain injury disability", "Transportation (this youth can't drive)", "Learning how to be independent, to live on my own and be responsible for myself."* Asked to think about challenges specifically related to their disabilities, two youth asserted they faced no disability related challenges. Challenges cited by other youth included: "*Brain injury disability", "Finding employment that is appropriate for my disability and is something I am interested in; it can be very hard."*

The employer representative noted that in terms of job readiness, work ethic, work skills, and knowledge: "*First Jobs youth have a longer "learning curve," in terms of dependability, accountability and social skills."*

***Question 3. What are the characteristics and issues <u>unique</u> to foster care and transition from foster care that impact employment outcomes?***

The case record review data did not specifically address this question. While a large proportion of sample members, (n=23, 67%), have documented disabilities, and one third, (n=12, 34%), of sample members were enrolled at lower than expected grade levels, neither of these issues is unique to foster care nor the transition from foster care.

Foster care placement is unique to foster care and all sample members were in placements. Seventeen (49%) were in foster family placements and 18 (51%) were in group home or independent living placements during their participation in First Jobs. The data did not

contain information about historical placement data, e.g. number, types, and lengths of placements for sample youth. These data would supply another valuable perspective to examine the youths First Jobs experiences.

Interview data had a rich supply of information related to factors unique to foster care that impact employment outcomes. The employer representative stated, "*First Jobs youth have a longer "learning curve," in terms of dependability, accountability and social skills."*

Three out of the five youth interviewed had been living with their foster parents in long-term, stable placements. These three youth felt the effects of being a foster youth were minimized the longer they lived with one, consistent foster family. Several youth considered themselves just like, "any other kid," and they did not feel they faced any unique barriers because of their foster care status. One youth said his foster care family was like any other family. He had been with the same family since age 8, and they were just like any other family to him. This youth did, however, face significant barriers due to the severity of his disability.

This was less true for youth who had moved around more frequently throughout their lives, and thus had less consistent adult support systems. One youth noted that his largest challenge as he left foster care was learning how to be independent—how to live on his own and be responsible for himself. These skills are much more difficult to learn when youth do not have a stable environment as they age. This same youth noted another significant challenge unique to foster youth—the stigma attached to being in foster care. According to this youth, youth in foster care are treated like, *"a separate class of people."* His experiences taught him that people have certain assumptions about youth in foster care—for example, *"that they need special attention, something is different about them."* This stigma has very real implications for youth who are attempting to transition from foster care to adulthood and employment. Many youth internalize the stigma, becoming insecure and self-conscious in the work environment. Throughout the interview process both youth and involved adults commented on the negative impacts low self-esteem had on youth's short-term job goals, and long-term career plans. One youth commented that her largest challenge was enhancing her self-esteem and believing in herself. One youth stated that foster youth get "*Less financial and emotional support than non-foster children."*

***Question 4. What are the types of job experience and work skill learning settings, employer and service provider practices, or other factors related to successful connections with a job and career path?***

The case record data provided a wealth of information about job experience, work skill learning settings, employer and service provider practices, and other factors related to successful connections with a job or career path.

Table 9 lists the distribution of the number of jobs that youth have held. For over two-thirds of the youth, the First Jobs position is the only job the youth have held. Four of the youth (12%) have held three or more jobs.

**Table 9. Number of Jobs (N=35)**

| Number of Jobs | Frequency | (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 24 | 69% |
| 2 | 7 | 20% |
| 3 | 1 | 3% |
| 4 | 2 | 6% |
| 5 | 1 | 3% |

Table 10 lists the distribution of services that youth participated in at First Jobs. Generally, the youth receive a very similar menu of services.

**Table 10. Distribution of Services Used in First Jobs Program (N=35)**

| Services Provided | Yes (%) | No (%) | Missing (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Life skills Assessment | 14 (40%) | 1 (3%) | 20 (57%) |
| Job acquisition skills training | 26 (74%) | 9 (6%) | 0 |
| Vocational evaluation/testing | 4 (11%) | 0 | 31 (89%) |
| Career Assessment | 12 (34%) | 23 (66%) | 0 |
| Career Counseling | 31 (11%) | 4 (89%) | 0 |
| Job retention skills training | 26 (74%) | 0 | 9 (26%) |
| Site visits | 31 (89%) | 4 (11%) | 0 |
| Job shadowing | 32 (91%) | 3 (9%) | 0 |
| Job placement | 35 (100%) | 0 | 0 |
| Job coaching | 35 (100%) | 0 | 0 |
| On-site work assessment | 33 (94%) | 2 (6%) | 0 |

The biggest difference, in services received, outlined in Table 11, is the difference in the level of job coaching support youth receive. Table 11 displays data describing the level of job coaching support sample youth received. Nine sample youth (26%) received Intensive job coaching support, defined as job coach present 75 percent or more of the time the employee is at the workplace. Fifteen youth (43%) received Moderate job coaching support, defined as job coach present from 25 percent-74 percent of the time the employee is at the workplace, while 11 youth (31%) received Minimal coaching support, defined as job coach present from check-in/site visits, through 24 percent of the time the employee is at the workplace.

**Table 11. Job Coaching Support Level (N=35)**

| Support Level | Frequency (%) |
|---|---|
| Intensive | 9 (26%) |
| Moderate | 15 (43%) |
| Minimal | 11 (31%) |

Tables 12–18 report the results of Chi-square analyses (using Fisher's Exact test to test for statistical significance in small samples). Chi-square analysis provides a more in-depth exploration of success measures for sample youth. It is important to note that few of these analyses achieved statistical significance, thus while we can describe the outcomes in greater detail and many of the outcomes make intuitive sense the lack of statistical significance means that we need to accept the possibility that the outcomes may have occurred by chance rather than by design. Cross-tabulations that achieved statistical significance at the 0.05 level or lower were entered into binary logistic regression analyses. None of these variables or other predictor variables entered into the regression analyses achieved statistical significance.

Table 12 shows the comparison of the success measure employment offered and the level of coaching support youth received. Overall, the most successful group of youth in terms of the measure employment offered are the youth who received Minimal coaching support, 10 of these 11 youth (91%), received offers to continue their employment after the end of the summer employment program. The least successful group are the youth who received Intensive coaching support. Four of these nine youth (44%) received offers to continue their employment after the end of the summer program. Youth who received Moderate coaching support achieved slightly better outcomes; eight of the 15 youth (53%) were offered employment after the end of the summer program.

**Table 12. Coaching Support Level by Employment Offered* (N=35)**

| | **Employment Offered** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Support Level** | **Yes (%)** | **No (%)** | **Total (%)** |
| Intensive | 4 (44%) | 5 (56%) | 9 (100%) |
| Moderate | 8 (53%) | 7 (47%) | 15 (100%) |
| Minimal | 10 (91%) | 1 (9%) | 11 (100%) |
| Total | 22 (63%) | 13 (37%) | 35 (100%) |

*Relationship is not statistically significant

Table 13 displays the results of the cross-tabulation of coaching support level and connection with positive peers. The majority of youth at all three coaching support levels achieved positive connections with peers at work. Youth who received Intensive coaching support had the poorest outcomes in terms of achieving positive peer connections. The relationship between support level and connection with positive peers was significant at the $p \leq .05$ level with youth with minimal support being 25% or more likely to have a connection with positive peers than youth with moderate to intensive support.

**Table 13. Coaching Support Level by Connection with Positive Peers** (N=35)**

| | **Connection w/ Positive Peers** | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Support Level** | **Yes** | **No** | **Total** |
| Intensive | 4 (57%) | 3 (43%) | 7 (100%) |
| Moderate | 11 (73%) | 4 (27%) | 15 (100%) |
| Minimal | 9 (100%) | 0 | 9 (100%) |
| Total | 24 (77%) | 7 (23%) | 31 (100%) |

**Relationship is significant at $p \leq 0.05$

Table 14 displays the comparison of coaching support level for sample youth and their overall employee review. Youth who received Minimal coaching support, 10 (91%), achieved the highest proportion of Excellent/Very Good overall employee reviews. Over half of the youth, eight (53%), who received Moderate or Intensive coaching support achieved Excellent/Very Good overall employee reviews. Slightly fewer than half, four (44%), of youth who received Intensive coaching support achieved Excellent/Very Good overall employee reviews. The relationship between support level and overall employee review is significant at the $p \leq .01$ level, with youth with minimal support being almost twice as likely to have an Excellent/Very Good review score.

**Table 14. Coaching Support Level by Overall Employee Review*** (N=35)**

| Support Level | Excellent/Very Good | Fair-terminated** | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intensive | 4 (44%) | 5 (55%) | 9 (100%) |
| Moderate | 8 (53%) | 7 (47%) | 15 (100%) |
| Minimal | 10 (91%) | 1 (9%) | 10 (100%) |
| Total | 22 (63%) | 13 (37%) | 35 (100%) |

***$p \leq 0.01$

**Terminated is not necessarily equivalent to being fired from a job, in some cases termination is the result of voluntary withdrawal from the program or is the result of a change in placement.

Table 15 compares the coaching support level youth received to the number of disabilities youth have. The most striking element of Table 16 is the fact that seven of the 12 youth with no disabilities (59%) received either Intensive coaching support, two (17%), or Moderate coaching support, five (42%). One possible reason for this higher than expected level of coaching support is the presence of other barriers to employment that are not related to disability status. Beyond this finding, it is apparent that as the number of disabilities rises the level of coaching support also tends to increase, shown by the fact that 87 percent of youth with two or more disabilities received Intensive, seven (47%), or Moderate, six (40%), coaching support.

**Table 15. Coaching Support Level by Number of Disabilities* (N=35)**

| | Support Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Disabilities | Intensive (%) | Moderate (%) | Minimal (%) | Total (%) |
| 0 | 2 (17%) | 5 (42%) | 5 (42%) | 12 (100%) |
| 1 | 0 | 4 (50%) | 4 (50%) | 8 (100%) |
| 2 or more | 7 (47%) | 6 (40%) | 2 (13%) | 10 (100%) |
| Total | 9 (26%) | 15 (43%) | 11 (31%) | 35 (100%) |

*Relationship is not statistically significant

Table 16 compares the number of disabilities of sample youth to the success measure employment offered. The major finding Table 16 reveals is that the majority of youth, 22 (63%), succeeded by the measure of employment offered, regardless of the number of disabilities the youth have. Half of the youth with no disabilities, six (50%), were offered employment, the majority of youth with one or more disabilities, 16 (70%), were offered employment after First Jobs ended.

**Table 16. Number of Disabilities by Employment Offered* (N=35)**

| | Employment Offered | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **# Disabilities** | **Yes (%)** | **No (%)** | **Total (%)** |
| 0 | 6 (50%) | 6 (50%) | 12 (100%) |
| 1 | 6 (75%) | 2 (25%) | 8 (100%) |
| 2 or more | 10 (67%) | 5 (33%) | 15 (100%) |

*Relationship is not statistically significant

Table 17 looks at the relationship between the number of disabilities and the overall employee review. Six of the 11 youth with no documented disabilities, (55%), achieved an overall employee review of Excellent/Very Good, among youth with one or more disabilities, 19 (83%), achieved an overall employee review of Excellent/Very Good.

**Table 17. Number of Disabilities by Overall Employee Review * (N=35)**

| | Overall Employee Review | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **#Disabilities** | **Excellent/Very Good (%)** | **Fair-Terminated (%)** | **Total (%)** |
| 0 | 6 (55%) | 5 (45%) | 11 (100%) |
| 1 | 6 (86%) | 1 (14%) | 7 (100%) |
| 2 or more | 13 (87%) | 2 (13%) | 15 (100%) |
| Total | 25 (76%) | 8 (24%) | 33 (100%) |

*Relationship is not statistically significant

Table 18 shows results of a cross-tabulation of placement type and employment offered. Over three-quarters of sample members living in Group Home/Independent Living placements, 14 (78%), were offered employment after the completion of the program. Slightly fewer than half of the sample members in Foster Home placements, 8 (47%), were offered employment after the completion of the summer program. The relationship between placement type and employment offered is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. The youth in this study who lived in group homes or independent living were 31% more likely to be offered employment than youth who lived in foster family.

**Table 18. Placement Type * Employment Offered** (N=35)**

| | Employment Offered | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Placement Type** | **Yes (%)** | **No (%)** | **Total** |
| Foster Home | 8 (47%) | 9 (53%) | 17 (100%) |
| Grp Home/Ind Living | 14 (78%) | 4 (22%) | 18 (100%) |
| Total | 22 (63%) | 13 (37%) | 35 (100%) |

**Relationship is significant at $p \leq 0.05$

Interview data provided a rich qualitative context for the quantitative data presented above. Discussing employer and service provider practices, the employer representative stated: "*The job coaches eliminated the need for the employer to provide special accommodations*

*for First Jobs youth. This service provides unique services and supports that relate to the "learning curve" piece. Youth in foster care need more support around social skills, appearance and customer service skills. Without job coach supports, First Jobs youth would probably have had lower success rates."* Talking about the potential gains for youth who work for this particular employer, the representative stated: "*It provides youth with an opportunity to establish a good work ethic, dependability, accountability and learning the importance of being on time."*

Youth perspectives on how their First Jobs experiences relate to their long-term career goals parallel the employer's perspective. Youth saw the experience as useful for future employment opportunities, for example: "*Makes me look reliable for other jobs."; "Makes me look good in the working world."; "Good experience, I learned what I can do well and what I have difficulty with."*

All youth interviewed found their job coach to be an enormously valuable asset as they learned how to function in the workplace. Job coaches, *"make sure I behave myself and keep on task,"* they provide mental and emotional support, they help find ways to make work easier given a youth's particular disabilities, they help youth begin to think about their future goals and how to achieve them, and sometimes the most important thing a job coach does is, *"just being there."* Job coaches help youth begin to think about jobs and careers in a way they may never have before, setting them on a path towards success.

Adults talked about supporting youth from three different perspectives (general supports provided, helping youth think about long-term work goals, and supports that First Jobs provides). Discussion about the general supports they provided included: "*Remind him of his strengths, talk to him about what he might want to do. I help him think decisions through, don't just take the first idea."; " Acknowledge that work will always involve a job coach, help him access state support funds. Hard to discuss career plans, for example, he wants to be a chef but he's afraid of knives. Redirect bad attitude; help him with social cues, what is/isn't OK to say to people."; "Started to get her thinking about college (youth is now in college). Help with self-esteem through positive feedback."*

Discussion about supporting youth by helping them think about long-term work goals included: "*Keep the level of communication high. It helps him to check in. I remind him of what is expected at work, how to approach his supervisor with requests for time off for non-work obligations."; "Redirect him, help him see things clearly, give him reality checks. He overestimates his abilities; I help ground him."* Two of the adults discussed the supports that First Jobs provided: "*Having First Jobs to focus on employment while other agencies focus on other needs. Conversations about career/life goals don't happen early enough for youth in foster care, too many other needs to deal with. Youth often don't know what they are capable of. Growing up in multiple placements creates problems."; "Job coach has been amazing; some temporary job coaches didn't help, this coach really helped, and came to graduation. Without First Jobs this youth would not be working at all."; "May not have gotten a job without First Jobs, many youth in foster care don't get much support. Many youth in foster care have more problems working with authority figures and knowing what is appropriate behavior at work."*

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The final section of the report includes conclusions and recommendations regarding employment supports and experiences to help prepare youth in foster care for the world of work.

### *Conclusion*

This study focused on career preparation and work-based learning experiences; one of the "Guideposts for Success" developed by the NCWD/Youth (2006). Through a brief literature review and an in-depth examination of the First Jobs case record data, youth outcomes of supported employment experiences were identified. This report included information on 35 Maine youth in foster care who participated in the First Jobs program.

The analysis addressed four research questions:

*1. What are the real or apparent mental and physical disabilities that are present in youth involved in First Jobs?*

*2. What are the overall job readiness, work ethic, work skills and knowledge, and other positive and negative issues related to employment?*

*3. What are the characteristics and issues unique to foster care and transition from foster care that impact employment outcomes?*

*4. What are the types of job experience and work skill learning settings, employer and service provider practices, or other factors related to successful connections with a job and career path?*

Generally, the employment experiences of sample youth were very positive. Over two-thirds of sample youth, 24 (69%), made a connection with positive peers at work, nearly three-quarters of sample members, 25 (71%), made a connection to an adult other than their job coach at work, and just under two-thirds of sample youth, 22 (63%), received offers of continued employment after the conclusion of the summer employment program. Looking at the fourth measure of employment success, nearly three quarters of sample youth, 25 (71%), received Excellent or Very Good overall employee reviews.

### *Recommendations*

**Recommendation 1.** Champion networking opportunities to help youth achieve employment success.

Youth in foster care typically have lower rates of employment than general population youth. Targeted early employment supports for youth in foster care can provide them with levels of support and levels of employment similar to those of general population youth. Youth aged 15-16 should be primary targets for supported early employment opportunities. Supported employment opportunities beginning at age 15 for youth in foster care to

equalize the advantages general population youth enjoy, especially the access to the "hidden job market."

Slightly over a third of the youth (38%) in our case review sample were ages 15 (9%) or 16 (29%). The age of youth in our sample may be older due to the high proportion of youth with disabilities, and a backlog of youth needing supported employment services, however, the levels of success of youth in our sample demonstrated the value of supported employment. Over two thirds of the youth in our sample, 24 (69%), gained their first employment experience through participating in the program, 29 sample members (83%), completed the First Jobs program.

**Recommendation 2. Cultivate business partnership with employers.**

The importance of the relationship between employers and employment service providers cannot be overstated. The more successful an employment service agency is at cultivating this key relationship, the greater the likelihood that youth will have successful employment experiences. One way employment support agencies cultivate this relationship is by learning each company's business culture and language, and then using that knowledge to create mutually beneficial arrangements between the employer and the employees the agency places.

The supported employment agency we studied in our case review works on employer relationships at multiple levels, outlined below.

1. Job Coach level: Job coaches cultivate employer relationships through proper dress, and attitudes and by setting examples for youth employees.

2. Vocational Coordinator level: The primary employer-relations role for this position is as a problem solver. When issues emerge that are beyond the purview of the job coach, the vocational coordinator is able to provide immediate support to help solve the problem, assuring employers that the employment services provider is able to provide immediate support when major problems occur. The following example illustrates the value of this role.

   > A youth, who did not have driver's license, agreed (at the prompting of a customer) to retrieve a customer's car so the customer would not get wet in the rain. The youth sought to provide excellent customer service (a hallmark of the employer), however, the youth's lack of driving skills resulted in the crashing of the customer's car. The vocational coordinator immediately responded and helped to minimize the consequences of the situation for all of the involved parties.

3. Advisory Team: The advisory team (composed of program personnel and business partners) meets three to four times per year for planning purposes. The advisory team meets prior to the beginning of the program and immediately after the conclusion of the program to wrap-up and talk about the summer experience.

4. Employer System Level: Work with employers to make system-level changes to accommodate supported employment candidates. For example,

   One business partner agreed to hire 16-17 year olds (previous company policy was an 18 year age minimum). Another business partner allowed supported employment job candidates to be exempted from the company's web-based job application process and pre-hiring aptitude test. Working with employers to create these systemic changes provides benefits for job candidates and employers.

**Recommendation 3**. **Use targeted employment specialists to support youth employment.**

Employment specialists can play several valuable roles for youth in foster care regardless of disability status. The employment specialist is an adult who plays a major supportive role focused on helping the youth explore career options, find employment, and through their supporting role at the job site help the youth learn about job responsibilities and employer expectations.

The interview data presented in this report indicates adults working with the youth felt that when an organization's mission is to focus solely on employment, they are able to provide a much higher level of employment support. Further, youth felt empowered by their "lessons learned" experience.

**Recommendation 4. All systems that provide services and supports to the youth need to be involved in transition work.**

The "interconnectedness" of the systems provides a wide variety of potential supports for youth, which could improve the probability of positive outcomes. Employment specialists work with and within this broader system, playing the role of services broker between key players. Employment specialist roles include: a) recruiting/encouraging youth through home visits; b) finding the route through the available supports (public and private) to help youth succeed in employment; c) exploring available supports at the individual level. Employment specialists also broker employment opportunities through private employers.

Youth in our sample are involved with multiple systems. Every youth has a Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) caseworker; many sample youth also have an additional caseworker through private foster care placement agencies. Sample youth are also MaineCare (Maine's Medicaid program) clients and youth with disabilities also have a Vocational Rehabilitation caseworker. Employment specialists collaborate with each of these service providers (including foster parents and other key adults and agencies in youths' lives) to provide youth with necessary employment services. Successful collaboration with representatives of all of these systems is critical to successful and continued employment experiences for youth. Employment specialists are particularly capable of serving this brokerage role because they have the time and resources to focus on employment, and they can capitalize on each member of the support constellation's

strengths. Employment specialists also provide the key link to the private sector, using their brokering skills to create employment opportunities and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with employers.

1. Example: The program we studied has been able to continuously (since summer 2004) provide coaching support for a youth who needs 100% coaching support. This success resulted from working with each member of the youth's constellation of support. This youth's job coach was initially funded through program grant funds. The employment service provider was able to continue coaching support with funding support from Vocational Rehabilitation, and after exhausting this funding source, negotiated funding support funding through a Maine Care Waiver. This case provides an excellent example of the "services broker" role the employment specialist played through continual collaboration and contact with the various agencies that make up this youth's constellation of support.

**Recommendation 5. Data and Reporting: Develop objective benchmarks for employment success.**

Sample case narratives defined success very broadly; completing the summer employment program constituted a successful outcome. The research team developed four quantifiable measures of success including:

1. Connection to positive peers at work
2. Connection to an adult (not job coach) at work
3. Employee offered continuing employment after program completion
4. Overall employee performance review

These measures allowed the research team to explore employment outcomes in a much more in-depth manner. However, the measures would be more reliable if they were developed as a routine part of case record keeping. The case record could include the following data elements with a ranking system. Each of these performance measures could be measured at intervals throughout the program period, with a final cumulative ranking on each measure at the end of the program.

**Recommendation 6. Future research using larger samples and program evaluation protocols designed in conjunction with supported employment providers will yield a more thorough understanding of the supports that contribute to successful early employment experiences for youth in foster care who also have disabilities**.

Our case record review data were limited by several factors including small sample size, and the limitations of the First Jobs program data collection protocol. We were unable to determine sample members' number of foster care placements or the number of schools sample youth attended; both important factors associated with successful outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care.

Our study was not intended as a program evaluation; however an evaluation protocol designed in conjunction with supported employment program staff and the agencies that refer youth to the supported employment program would provide a number of benefits including:

- A data collection protocol that includes factors known to influence transition success for youth in foster care and for youth with disabilities.
- A data collection protocol that includes variables associated with employment success.
- The potential to analyze larger samples either by looking at multiple programs or by examining a single program across a number of years.

Our case record data enabled us to partially assess factors thought to influence successful employment outcomes. A study with a larger sample size and more tightly defined data collection protocol will provide data for a more rigorous analysis of youth in care with disabilities and their early employment experiences and outcomes.

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# Appendices

1. **Measurement Tools (case record review tool, interview questions)**

- **First Jobs Client Profile Data Collection Instrument 1.9.2005**

Whenever possible the data collection instrument is designed to collect data as both dichotomous (1, 0) and continuous (1 … n) variables.

1. **General demographics**
   a. Client DOB (MM/DD/YYYY) ___/___/_____
   b. Client gender: ____ Male ____ Female
   c. Ethnicity (per U.S. Census)
      i. ____ White
      ii. ____ Black/African American
      iii. ____ American Indian/Alaskan native
      iv. ____ Asian
      v. ____ Hawaiian/Pacific islander
      vi. ____ Other
      vii. ____ 2 or more races
      viii. ____ Hispanic/Latino (any race)
   d. Date of Program Enrollment (MM/DD/YYYY) ___/___/_____
   e. Juvenile Justice Involvement: ____ Yes ____ No
   f. Client has health insurance ____ Yes ____ No
   g. Type of health insurance ____ MaineCare ____ Private
2. **Health/Disability**
   a. Client has documented disability(s) ____ Yes ____ No
      i. How many documented disabilities? ____
   b. Disability(s) type (Check all that apply)
      ____ Physical disability
      ____ Sensory disability (vision)
      ____ Sensory disability (hearing)
      ____ Mental disability (cognitive)
      ____ Mental disability (mental health)
      ____ Mental disability (learning disability)
      ____ Mental disability (emotional/behavioral disability)
      ____ Self-care disability
3. **Education**
   a. Grade level at program enrollment _____
      i. Based on age can be dichotomized to 1 = At grade level 0 = Below grade level
   b. Special Education services ____ Yes ____ No
   c. IEP in file ____ Yes ____ No ___ NA
   d. Transition Plan in file ____ Yes ____ No ____ NA
   e. IEP Service Level ____ Regular classroom ____ Special classroom ___ Other setting ____ NA
   f. Section 504 Plan in file ____ Yes ____ No ___ NA
   g. Client involved in extracurricular activities ____ Yes ____ No

h. Academic achievement
    ____ Excellent (A's & B's) ____ Good (B's and C's)
    ____ Fair (C's and D's) ____ Poor (D's And F's)
    ____ Failing (F's)
i. Plans for post-secondary education ____ Yes ____ No

**4. Placement information**

a. Placement type ____ DHHS ____ Private Agency
b. Current placement ____ Foster Home ____ Group Home
    ____Other (*Please specify)* _____
c. Total number of placements _____
d. Year of entry into care 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____

**5. Employment experience prior to First Jobs enrollment**

a. Client ever employed ____ Yes ____ No
b. If yes, was termination ____ Voluntary ____ Involuntary
c. Client engaged in volunteer work ____ Yes ____ No
d. If client was employed prior to First Jobs enrollment, please list job(s) and employer(s)

| Employer | Job title | Job duration (days) | Reason Job ended |
|---|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

**6. First Jobs services provided ( If services, e.g. assessments, are performed more than once we would collect data in a Pre/Post format.**

a. Job acquisition skills training (JAS) ____ Yes ____ No
    i. JAS Score _____
b. Vocational evaluation/testing (VET) ____ Yes ____ No
    i. VET Score _____
c. Career assessment (CA) ____ Yes ____ No
    i. CA Score _____
d. Career Counseling ____ Yes ____ No
e. Job retention skills training (JRS) ____ Yes ____ No
    i. JRS Score _____
f. Site visits ____ Yes ____ No
g. Job shadowing ____ Yes ____ No
h. Job placement ____ Yes ____ No
i. Job coaching ____ Yes ____ No
j. On-site work assessment ____ Yes ____ No
k. Other services/supports (Please List)

**7. First Jobs Employment Experience**

a. What job(s) did client hold? (Please list employer and job)

| Employer | Job title | Job duration (days) | Reason Job ended |
|---|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

The following questions focus on the client's most successful job experience. ETI personnel may need to help us identify the most successful experience for youth with multiple jobs.

b. What services/supports are associated with a successful job experience?

c. Connection with a positive peer at work ____ Yes ____ No

d. Connection to an adult (not job coach) at work ____ Yes ____ No

**Involved Adult (Mentor, Foster Parent, etc.) Questionnaire 12.13.2005**

**Introduction**

We are conducting a study focused on the employment experiences of foster care youth with disabilities. One of the goals of our study is to learn what types of supports, work skill learning settings and job experiences help youth make successful connections with a job and career path. One of the youth in our study sample identified you as an adult who provides him/her with a source of support. This interview explores the supports you provide _____

1. What do you see as your primary role in your relation ship with _____?

_____

2. Do you work at the same place as _____?

_____ Yes ____ No

3. Do you discuss _____'s current job or past job experiences?

_____ Yes ____ No

3a. If yes, can you briefly describe a typical discussion or conversation about _____'s current job or past job experiences?

_____

4. Do you help _____ think about long-term job and career possibilities?

_____ Yes ____ No

4a. If yes, can you describe a typical discussion or conversation about long-term job and career possibilities?

_____

4b. In your opinion, are _____'s long-term employment and career goals achievable?

_____ Yes ____ No

4c. If yes, what supports do you think _____will need to reach this goal?

_____

_____

4d. If no, what do you see as barriers to _____ achieving this goal?

_____

_____

5. Thinking about _____'s employment goals, what do you think is the most valuable thing you do to help him/her think about work? (Short-term)

_____

_____

5a. Thinking about _____'s career goals, what do you think is the most valuable thing you do to help him/her think about his/her career? (Long-term)

_____
_____

6. What do you consider the most important support you provide to _____?
_____
_____

7. What do you think are the one or two largest challenges _____ faces during the transition to adulthood?
_____
_____

8. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience with _____?
_____
_____

**Employer Questionnaire 12.13.2005**

**Introduction**

We are conducting a study focused on the employment experiences of foster care youth with disabilities. One of the goals of out study is to learn what types of supports, work skill learning settings and job experiences help youth make successful connections with a job and career path. You have worked with one or more of the youth in our study sample. This interview explores the supports you provided.

1. Why was your company interested in providing employment to youth with disabilities and youth in foster care?

_____

_____

2. Can you describe, in a general way, the "typical" expectations you have for youth in entry level jobs?

_____

_____

3. Are the typical expectations different in any way for First Job Youth?

_____

_____

3a. If yes, what are these different expectations and why do you have them?

_____

_____

4. Based on your experience, are issues related to job readiness, work ethic, work skills and knowledge etc., different for youth with disabilities in foster care compared to other youth with disabilities? Other youth in general?

_____ Yes _____ No

4a. If yes, can you describe how it's different? And what factors do you think might cause these differences?

_____

_____

5. Reflecting on the services First Jobs youth receive, which service do you think is most helpful? (Please pick one service)

_____

_____

5a. Why do you think this service is most helpful?

_____

_____

_____

5b. Do you think youth in foster care require any unique services/supports compared to other youth employees?

_____ Yes _____ No

5c. If yes, what are those services/supports and why do you think they are necessary?

_____

_____

6. Again, reflecting on the services First Job youth receive, which service do you think is <u>least</u> helpful?

_____

6a. Why do you think this service is <u>least</u> helpful?

_____

_____

7. What do you consider the most important thing youth can gain through their experience working with you/your company? (connection to job and career path)

_____

_____

8. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience providing employment supports to youth with disabilities in foster care?

_____

_____

**Youth Questionnaire Draft** 11.28.2005

We are conducting a study focused on the employment experiences of foster care youth with disabilities. One of the goals of our study is to learn what types of supports, work skill learning settings and job experiences help youth make successful connections with a job and career path. This interview explores your work experience.

**Demographics**

1. Are you _____ Female _____ Male

2. How old are you? _____

3. Are you still in care? _____ Yes _____ No

4. Are you attending school? _____ Yes _____ No

   4a. If yes, where are you attending school? (What level, e.g. high school, community college, etc.) _____

5. What is the highest grade you have completed? _____

6. What is/are your disability(s)? _____

7. What sources of income did you have in 2006?

   _____ Employment
   _____ Student award (grants, scholarships, not loans)
   _____ Social security
   _____ Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
   _____ Other

8. What was you total income from employment this last year (during 2006)?

   _____ $0-$1,000
   _____ $1001-$3,000
   _____ $3,001-$5,000
   _____ $5,001-$7,000
   _____ $7,001-$9,000
   _____ $9,001-$11,000
   _____ $11,001-$13,000
   _____ $13,001 or more

10. What are your immediate employment goals? (Short-term, why are you working or why do you want to work now?)

_____

11. What are your long-term career ambitions? (Long-term, what do you want to do, what do you want from your long-term employment?)

_____

12. Do you need workplace accommodations? _____ Yes _____ No

    12a. If yes, please describe the accommodations you need.

    _____

13. What do you think are some of the challenges you face as you transition from foster care to work or school?

_____

14. Do you think foster care youth face any unique challenges relating to being in care as they transition to adulthood? If yes, what are they?

_____

15. Do you think you face any additional challenges related to your disability? If yes, what are they?

_____

16. What job(s) have you held? For each job, can you tell me if it was a job you found by yourself or a job that First Jobs helped you find?

| Job | Source |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

17. Did this job/these jobs meet your immediate employment goals?

_____ Yes _____ No

17a. If no, can you tell my why?

_____

18. Did your job(s) help you in any way with your long-term career ambitions?

_____ Yes _____ No

18a. If yes, how did it help you?

_____

19. Did you find the services/support that First Jobs provided helpful?

_____ Yes _____ No

20. Please list the services that First Jobs provided.

_____

20a. Reflecting on these services, which service did you find <u>most</u> helpful?

_____

20b. Again, reflecting on these services, which service did you find <u>least</u> helpful?

_____

21. Thinking about your job, can you tell me one of the best things that happened at work?

_____

22. Thinking about your job, can you tell me one of the most challenging things that happened at work?

_____

23. What was the most important thing you learned at your current (or last) job that will help you the most in the future?

_____

24. When you have a problem at work (e.g. don't understand a task, can't do the task) who do you ask for help?

_____

25. Can you tell me the name of one adult you can rely on for support? _____

25a. Can I have your permission to talk to this person about you and your employment experiences? _____ Yes _____ No

26. Thinking about this adult, what do you think is the most valuable support this adult provides you?

_____

27. Is there anything else about your employment experience(s) you would like to tell me?

_____

28. Is there anything else about your experience(s) with ETI you would like to tell me?

_____

## Full Literature Review

**C.S. Mott Literature Review: Study of Employment of Foster Care Youth with Disabilities**
**Prepared by: Al Sheehy, Muskie School of Public Service and Amy Gieseke, USM Graduate Student**
**December, 2006**

Foster and Gifford (2004) present the following picture:

> Roughly 20,000 youth in a given year age out of foster care and are on their own, often with limited family ties. Nearly 38,000 youth aged 17-20 were in residential placement for juvenile offenses in 1997, and a large proportion of those face a release plan with diminishing amounts of supervision after a stretch of highly structured living. Approximately 375,000 students left special education in the 2000-2001 school year, often without a high school degree, to face adult challenges without a familiar support system…Teens in foster care, juvenile justice and special education, however, often come from families whose economic resources are limited, and in some cases, whose family relationships have degraded. (p. 1)

### I. National Picture

#### a. Disabled Youth—Education and Employment

There are several reliable sources for national data on youth with disabilities, including U.S. Census data and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) the second iteration of a comprehensive national study first conducted in 1987. NLTS-2 interviews occurred during 2003.

Focusing on the macro level, the 2000 U.S. Census reports that overall, 19.2%[3] of Americans aged five and over have a sensory, physical, mental, or self-care disability. Table 1 presents the data on the prevalence of disabilities in the United Sates by age group. While data for youth ages 16-20 are not broken out, it is probably reasonable to assume that the prevalence rate is quite similar to that of the 5-15 age group, roughly 6 percent.

**Table 1**
**United States: Disability Prevalence by Age Group**

| US Census National Disability Status | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Disability Status of the Civilian Non-institutionalized Population** | | | | |
| **Age Group** | **Total** | **%** | **With a Disability** | **%** |
| 5 and over | 257,167,525 | 100% | 32,178,220 | 12.50% |
| 5-15 | 451,337 | 100% | 2,614,920 | 5.80% |
| 16-64 | 1,786,871 | 100% | 17,300,050 | 9.70% |
| 65 and over | 33,346,625 | 100% | 12,263,250 | 36.80% |

Source: U.S. Census

The examination of older youth with disabilities is the primary focus of NLTS-2. Data from NLTS-2 compares two cohorts: Cohort 1 (1987) and Cohort 2 (2003). (All statistics are for youth

[3] Even the U.S. Census Bureau can only estimate the number of people with disabilities in the United States. Stern (____) in a limited review article distributed by the U.S. Census Bureau notes that, "According to Census 2000, 48.9 million people 5 years old and over living in housing units [i.e. noninstitutionalized] had a disability. This represents 19.2 percent of that population. The Census 2000 Supplemental Survey (C2SS) …estimated that 39.7 million people aged 5 and over living in housing units (15.6 percent) had a disability." This review uses the higher figure generated by Census 2000.

who are out of school). The subset of youth included in the early post-school analysis has been out of high school for up to two years. Table 2 presents NTLS-2 data. These data show that outcomes for youth with disabilities have improved substantially from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2, however Cohort 2 youth still lag substantially behind general population youth.

**Table 2**
**NLTS-2 Education and Employment Data**

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| **Disabled youth completing high school**: | |
| Cohort 1 | 54% |
| Cohort 2 | 70% |
| **Any postsecondary education participation:** | |
| Cohort 1 | 15% |
| Cohort 2 | 32% |
| **Employment Status** | |
| Worked for pay since leaving high school | |
| Cohort 1 | 55% |
| Cohort 2 | 70% |
| Working at time of survey | |
| Cohort 1 | 41% |
| Cohort 2 | 49% |
| Percentage who earned more than federal minimum wage | |
| Cohort 1 | 70% |
| Cohort 2 | 85% |
| Average wage (Inflation adjusted, expressed in 2003 dollars) | |
| Cohort 1 | $7.80 |
| Cohort 2 | $7.30 |

Source: NLTS-2

Murray et al. (2003) conducted a study analyzing two cohorts of high school graduates including youth both with and without learning disabilities from three large school districts in the northwestern United States. The final study population included 168 youth with learning disabilities and 315 youth without disabilities. Findings at two points, five years and 10 years after high school graduation (two separate cohorts), included the following postsecondary educational data. Focusing on the five-year cohort, Murray reported that compared to non-disabled students, youth with learning disabilities were more than four times as likely (37% vs. 9%) to have not attended any postsecondary education. Youth with learning disabilities were nearly seven times less likely (9% vs. 62%) to have attended a four-year college. Postsecondary school attendance data for both cohorts are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3**
**Post High School Outcomes for Learning Disabled Youth vs. Non-disabled Youth**

| Attendance | Learning Disabilities | No Disabilities |
|---|---|---|
| **Year 5** | | |
| Never attended | 37% | 9% |
| Training | 17% | 6% |
| Community college | 38% | 23% |
| Four year college | 9% | 62% |
| **Year 10** | | |
| Never attended | 49% | 20% |
| Training | 20% | 10% |
| Community college | 25% | 17% |
| Four year college | 6% | 53% |

Blackorby and Wagner (1996) noted similar findings in a study focusing on transition-to-employment instead of transition-to-education data. They found that one to two years after leaving school, youth with disabilities had a 46 percent employment rate, significantly lower than that of peers without disabilities (59%). Expanding their focus to specific disabilities, the authors reported that youth with learning disabilities (LD) had the same employment rate as non-disabled peers while employment rates for youth with emotional disturbances (ED) (41%) and mental retardation (MR) (29%) were significantly lower than employment rates for non-disabled youth.

### b. Disabled Youth in Foster Care—Education and Employment

Determining the prevalence of disabilities among children and youth in foster care is difficult. One possible measure, reported by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth, 2005) uses enrollment in special education as a proxy for disability. Using this measure NCWD/Youth reported, "Of the more than 500,000 children in foster care, 30 to 40 percent are also in special education," (p. 2). The authors noted that this estimate does not include adolescent youth, when mental and emotional disabilities often manifest themselves. One other issue that emerges when using special education enrollment as a proxy for disabilities is that it may undercount the number of children with disabilities, for example, children with disabilities, identified as eligible for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 would not be counted using this proxy.

In a comparable study Leslie, et al. (2003) reported:

> 20%-60% of young children entering foster care have a developmental disability or delay. Problems include prematurity, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, developmental delays, and learning disabilities, as well as speech, hearing and vision impairments. This compares with an estimate of ≈ 10% among the general population (pp. 134-135).

Courtney et al. (2004) present another perspective, examining educational data on youth both in and out of foster care. The authors also described the types and frequencies of disabilities these

students experience. Examining a sample of high school aged youth in out-of-home care in Chicago the authors reported that the average reading level for youth completing grade 10 or 11 is grade seven. Fewer than one in five of these youth achieved an "A" in English, math, history or science. The authors presented the following table displaying the disability status of youth in foster care compared to youth enrolled in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Slightly more than half of youth in care (55%) were not classified as having a disability, compared to 84 percent of the general student population. Youth in care were 1.6 times more likely (19% vs. 12%) to be classified as learning disabled; and nine times as likely (18% vs. 2%) to be classified with an Emotional/Behavioral disability. Youth in care were also nearly three times as likely as other CPS youth (8% vs. 3%) to be classified with another type of disability.

**Table 4**
**Percentage of 8th Grade Chicago Public School Students Classified as Disabled and Receiving Special Education Services (Courtney, et al. p. 4).**

| | N | Not Classified (%) | Classified as Leaning Disabled (%) | Classified as having an Emotion/Behavioral Disorder (%) | Classified with another type of disability (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Out-of-Home Care | 395 | 55% | 19% | 18% | 8% |
| Other CPS* | 27,549 | 84% | 12% | 2% | 3% |

*Chicago Public School

A survey of Maine youth, aged 14-21 in foster care (Zanghi, et al., 1999) provided the following data on the educational challenges of these youth (n=134):

- 28 percent reported six or more placements since entering care (median = 4)
- 35 percent reported four or more school changes caused by changes in foster care placement
- 31 percent were at least one year behind grade level based on their age
- 41 percent received special education services during the last five years (compared to a state service rate of 16 percent during the same period)
- 75 percent reported a desire to attend college; however, only 30 percent reported taking college preparatory classes. (pp. 10-13).

These data support other findings that foster care youth are significantly over-represented in special education. Between 30 and 50 percent of children in foster care are placed in special education compared with 12 percent of the general school population (Hunt & Marshall, 2002). Geenan and Powers (in-press manuscript, 2005) outline the effects of this overrepresentation of foster youth in special education in a report on the results of several studies conducted within the grant structure of the Fostering Futures Project (a project supported by the U.S. Department of Education). The authors studied both educational achievement levels and transition plans of youth with disabilities in foster care and reported a number of findings pointing toward inadequate levels of service for foster care youth with disabilities. Looking at issues of school success in a large urban school district in Oregon; the authors compared the educational achievement of four groups of youth. The groups include youth who were in both foster care and special education (n=70), youth in foster care only (n=88), youth in general education, (n=88)

and youth in special education (n=81). The authors found that youth in both foster care and special education:

- Had lower grade point averages (than youth in general education)
- Changed schools more frequently (than youth in general education and youth in special education only)
- Earned fewer credits toward graduation (than youth in general education)
- Had lower scores on state testing (than youth in general education and youth in foster care only)
- Were more likely to be exempted from state testing (than youth in general education and youth in foster care only)
- Were more likely to be in segregated special education classes (than youth in special education only)
- Had more instability in foster care placement (than youth in foster care only) (2003, pp. 1-2).

The authors stated, "Foster youth who also experience disability appear to be most at risk for falling off the bridge, [experiencing educational failure] as the whipsaw effect of both foster care and special education may place them at even further risk for academic failure," (In-press manuscript, p. 4).

Geenan and Powers (2005) reported on a second study examining the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The report compared transition plans for a sample of youth in foster care and special education (n=45) with a group of students in special education only (n=45). Comparing transition plans of the two groups, the authors found that "the plans of foster youth generally had goals of poor quality and, compared to the special education only group, significantly fewer goals," (in-press manuscript, 2005b). Describing study findings, (2004) the authors' listed thirteen examples from the transition plans of youth in both foster care and special education. They found that transition plans for the youth in care:

- Were less likely to include goals for post-secondary education
- Were less likely to include goals for developing independent living skills
- Had significantly fewer goals overall, and additionally, 20% of the plans had no goals listed
- Often had no plan for how to reach goals; 32% of transition goals listed on the plan had no accompanying action steps
- Revealed less advocate involvement
- Indicated that caseworkers were typically absent from meetings
- Often had caseworkers and families listed as responsible for transition activities even though they had not attended the Individual Education Plan/Transition Plan (IEP/TP) meeting
- Typically listed the student as responsible for working on transition goals, often with little or no support from others
- Lacked a specific timeline for goal completion; only seven percent of goals identified a specific target date

- Rarely described effective practices known to promote successful transition outcomes (such as training around self-determination, person centered or career planning, extra-curricular activities, mentoring, and individualized financial support)
- Were more than twice as likely to have youth slotted for a modified rather than standard diploma
- Did not focus on career development
- Revealed little understanding or acknowledgement of foster care issues (2004, pp. 2-3).

While some educational data on youth with disabilities in foster care are available, employment data for foster care or former foster care youth rarely focus on youth with disabilities as a distinct group. One study, The National Evaluation of the Title IV-E Independent Living Program (Westat, 1991), compared the outcomes of youth emancipating from foster care with an identified disability (47%) to non-disabled youth emancipating from foster care. The authors found that foster youth with disabilities were less likely to be employed, less likely to be high school graduates, and less likely to have social support and to be self-sufficient.

Data concerning youth with foster care (disability status unknown) are more widely available. For example, Goerge et al. (2002) examined employment data for foster care youth in three states, California, Illinois, and South Carolina. The authors were able to access data from the three states unemployment insurance (UI) systems and examined UI data for 13 quarters for the youth samples, the four quarters prior to exit from care and the eight quarters following their exit from care. The authors divided foster care youth into two groups: an "aging out" group (n=4,213), youth emancipated from foster care, and a reunification group (n=5,415), youth reunified with their families anytime after their fourteenth birthday. They then compared these two groups to a third comparison "low income" group (n=247,295) comprised of youth who were part of an AFDC or TANF case during the period between their fourteenth and eighteenth birthdays. Briefly summarizing their findings, the authors reported:

- Youth aging out of foster care earn significantly less than youth in any of the comparison groups both prior to and after their eighteenth birthday. …these youth average less than $6,000 per year in wages, which is substantially below the 1997 poverty level of $7,890 for a single individual (p. 1)
- …in none of the three states in any of the 13 quarters are there more than 45 percent of the aging out youth who have earnings. This is also the case for reunified youth. For AFDC/TANF youth, there is a larger percentage of youth who have earnings, but never more that 50 percent (p. 15).

The following finding illustrates the value of early initiation of employment:

- In all three states, youth were more likely to earn income for the first time during the four quarters prior to and the quarter of their eighteenth birthday than in the two years afterward (p. 27).

- In California and South Carolina, if youth did not begin work prior to age 18, there was a slightly better than 50-50 chance they would begin employment after age 18. In Illinois,

youth who did not have earnings prior to their eighteenth birthday were unlikely to begin earning income after their exit from foster care during our study period (p. 27).

The authors provided a comparison of employment rates with the general population using data from the Current Population Survey. Using only Illinois data for comparison, the authors found:

- 16 percent of the foster care group was employed compared with 24.7 percent of youth in general. During the summer, the difference was even greater, with 19.4 percent of Illinois foster children aged 15-17 employed compared with 33.8 percent of youth in general (p. 28).

Adding to these findings Courtney and Dworsky (2005) reported interview results for a sample of 603 youth at age 19. The youth were from three states, Illinois (where youth are allowed to remain in care until age 21) and Wisconsin and Iowa (where youth are generally discharged at age 18 and in some cases at age 19). The sample was divided into two groups; youth still in care (n=282, 47%) and discharged youth (n=321, 53%). The authors used a nationally representative group of 19 year olds from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) as a comparison group. Focusing on employment and earnings, the authors found:

- their employment [sample youth] was often sporadic and seldom provided them with financial security. Only 40 percent of the young adults in the Midwest Study were currently employed, considerably less that the 58.2 percent of the 19 year olds in the Add Health sample… Of the study participants who reported income from employment during the past year, [2003-2004] more than three-quarters earned less than $5,000 and 90 percent earned less than $10,000 (p. 8).

Nearly a third of the youth interviewed, 30.9 percent, reported being neither in school nor employed. A similar study by Parrish et al. (2001) found that three fourths of foster care children performed below grade level and more than half had been retained at least one year. They also found that foster care youth were twice as likely as non-foster care youth to leave school without obtaining a diploma.

### c. Disabled Youth in Juvenile Corrections—Education and Employment

Disabled youth committed to juvenile corrections facilities face many of the same education and transition issues as youth in foster care placement. In fact, a substantial proportion of youth in the juvenile justice system are also in the foster care system. Uggen and Wakefield (2005), using data from national surveys and interviews with youth in the Minnesota juvenile justice system, reported that about 16 percent of youth in secure juvenile justice placements have also been in foster care or institutional homes. Committed youth are burdened with two additional issues, adjudication for at least one crime and commitment to a secure facility where the ability to leave the facility for any reason is often based on earned privileges. The transition experience for

incarcerated youth often involves transitioning back to the community, where they experience far less structure than they are accustomed to in the institutional environment.

Estimates of the prevalence of disabilities among youth in the juvenile justice system are widely available, but vary in their findings—estimates range from 75 percent (Reichard, 1986) to as low as 23 percent (Bullock & McArthur, 1994). Reasons for this wide variance include differing definitions of disability and differing proportions of the correctional population examined. Some studies attempt to assess disability prevalence rates at only secure facilities, other studies attempt to assess disability prevalence rates across the entire juvenile offender population. The wide variance of prevalence rates reported by individual states in one study ranged from four to 100 percent.

Three national surveys (Bullock & McArthur, 1994; Morgan, 2001; and Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005) have attempted to estimate the proportion of youth with disabilities in secure juvenile corrections facilities in the United States. All three studies use the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) definition of disabling conditions as a basis for their estimates. Bullock and McArthur (1994), analyzing sample data based on a 60 percent response rate, estimate that youth with disabilities make up approximately 23 percent of the population of juvenile offenders in secure confinement. Morgan, (2001) based on a 100 percent response rate, estimate the overall prevalence of disabilities at 42.4 percent, 3.4 times higher than the national average prevalence of 12.3 percent. Quinn, et al. (2005), working with a sample based on a 76 percent response rate, estimate the prevalence of disabilities at 33.4 percent (response ranges from 9.1%-77.5%), compared to the 8.8 percent (IDEA) service rate for the 2000-2001 school year, indicating 3.8 times as many youth qualify for and receive special education services in juvenile corrections facilities than in the general population.

Table 5 summarizes the findings of the three national studies. Based on estimates reported by Morgan (2001) and Quinn, et al. (2005) youth in juvenile corrections facilities have prevalence rates of disabilities 3.4 to 3.8 times higher than youth in the general population.

**Table 5**
**Juvenile Justice National Study Disability Prevalence Estimates**

| Study | Juvenile justice disability prevalence % | General children's disability prevalence % | Difference factor (Juvenile/General) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bullock, McArthur (1994) | 23% | NA | NA |
| Morgan (2001) | 42.4% | 12.3% | 3.4 |
| Quinn, et al. (2005) | 33.4 | 8.8 | 3.8 |

Youth residing in juvenile correctional facilities have educational deficits that are very similar to those of youth in foster care. Baltodano, Harris & Rutherford (2005) examined a sample of 186 youth confined to a secure juvenile facility in Arizona. Youth were tested with several curriculum-based measures to test their reading and mathematics skills. The average age of the youth tested was 16.2 (range 13-17). The average reading level was at the eighth grade level; the

average mathematics score was at the seventh grade level. The authors' emphasized that while the youth are behind academically, the majority of the sample were less than one standard deviation below the mean for their age groups.

Leone, Meisel, and Drakeford (2002) noted that educational difficulties in correctional facilities were often exacerbated by inadequate mechanisms for the transfer of school records between public schools and correctional institutions, a problem similar to that faced by youth in foster care who transfer from one school to another as a result of a change in placement. The authors listed a number of additional problems juvenile correctional facility school programs face including:

- Youth entering correctional settings with skill deficits, behavior problems, and substance abuse issues that present difficulties in educational programming. At the same time, juvenile correctional institutions often have limited capacity to support appropriate educational interventions for the youth confined to their custody. (p. 49).

## II. Maine Picture

### a. Disabled Youth

Table 6 compares the disability profiles of the Maine population aged 5 and over to the U.S. population aged 5 and over. Overall, Maine has a slightly higher percentage (20.0% to 19.3%) of citizens aged 5 and over with disabilities than the 5 and over population of the United States. Looking at more specific types of disabilities the Maine proportion is higher than the overall U.S. average in every area except for self-care disabilities. Table 6 displays the details of the comparison.

**Table 6**
**Disability Profile of Maine Population Aged 5 and Over Compared to the Unites States Population Aged 5 and Over**

| US. Census Disability Status for the United States and Maine | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Disability Profile of Population aged 5 and over (%) | | | | | |
| | Any Disability | Sensory Disability | Physical Disability | Mental Disability | Self-care Disability |
| **Maine** | 20.0% | 4.4% | 9.5% | 5.8% | 2.5% |
| **United States** | 19.3% | 3.6% | 8.2% | 4.8% | 2.6% |

Source: U.S. Census

Young people 5 to 20 years of age make up the smallest subset of disabled persons in Maine, 24,991 (9%) of the population in this age group has a disability. Table 7 shows Maine disability status by age group.

**Table 7**
**Maine Disability Status by Age Group**

| Disability Status of the Civilian Non-institutionalized Population | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age Group** | **Total** | **%** | **With a Disability** | **%** |
| 5-20 | 278,711 | 100% | 24,991 | 9.0% |
| 21-64 | 733,415 | 100% | 141,018 | 19.2% |
| 65+ | 174,998 | 100% | 71,901 | 41.1% |
| Total | 1,187,824 | 100% | 237,910 | 20.0% |

Source: U.S. Census

Overall, 54.4 percent of Maine citizens with disabilities aged 16-64 are employed; slightly less than the comparable rate of 55.8 percent for the United States as a whole. County level employment rates for Maine citizens with disabilities range from a low of 47.3 percent in Somerset County to a high of 62.2 percent in York County. There is no direct correlation between overall county employment rate and the rate of employment for persons with disabilities. York County had the highest rate of employment for citizens with disabilities but is ranked fourth in overall employment rate; while Somerset County is ranked 12$^{th}$ of the sixteen counties in overall employment rate yet ranks 16$^{th}$ in the employment rate for people with disabilities. Data are displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8**
**Maine Employed Civilian Non-institutionalized Population Aged 21 to 64 Years**

| | % Employed of civilian, non-institutionalized population 21-64 years | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **County** | **Total** | **W/ Disability** | **No Disability** |
| Lincoln | 76.9% | 62.2% | 80.0% |
| York | 79.0% | 61.4% | 82.9% |
| Cumberland | 80.4% | 59.6% | 84.3% |
| Sagadahoc | 79.2% | 59.6% | 83.1% |
| Hancock | 75.7% | 57.2% | 79.7% |
| Piscataquis | 68.8% | 56.5% | 73.4% |
| Knox | 77.4% | 56.2% | 81.2% |
| Washington | 67.2% | 54.6% | 72.1% |
| Androscoggin | 77.4% | 53.3% | 83.9% |
| Kennebec | 76.8% | 53.3% | 82.8% |
| Oxford | 74.4% | 52.1% | 80.5% |
| Waldo | 74.2% | 50.3% | 80.0% |
| Franklin | 72.8% | 49.5% | 78.6% |
| Penobscot | 73.8% | 48.6% | 79.7% |
| Aroostook | 69.3% | 48.0% | 76.9% |
| Somerset | 72.2% | 47.3% | 79.4% |
| State | 74.7% | 54.7% | 81.6% |

Source: U.S. Census

## III. Transition to Adulthood

### a. Barriers to successful transition for disabled youth

Despite the fact that almost 80 percent of Americans with disabilities report a preference for working, approximately 76 percent remain unemployed (Schall, 1998). Scholars have various explanations for this startling statistic. Hagner et al. (1996) highlighted several factors, which they believed contribute to this high rate of unemployment among the disabled. They sited:

- Discrimination in employment and other aspects of life
- Practical issues (e.g. transportation, nontraditional means of communication) that make it difficult to seek and secure employment
- Limited access to the "hidden job market"
- Employer presumptions about the characteristics and abilities of qualified job applicants

Along with difficulties in obtaining employment, individuals with disabilities also experience trouble maintaining and advancing in their careers. In fact, people with disabilities often experience career patterns consisting of a series of entry-level positions interspersed with extended periods of unemployment (Roessler and Bolton, 1985). A separate study noted that students with disabilities may also be disproportionately exposed to the potentially negative effects of poverty. This study, The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS), is a national study of the characteristics, experiences and achievements of students with disabilities in elementary and middle school. A recent paper documenting its results (2002) outlined detailed demographic information on the sample noting that:

- more than one-third (36%) of students with disabilities lived in households with incomes of $25,000 or less, compared with 24% of children in the general population. Almost twice as many children in the general population lived in households with incomes of more than $75,000 as children with disabilities (24.2% and 13.3% respectively).

The study also found that almost one in four students with disabilities (24%) were living in poverty compared with one in six (16%) of students in the general population.(Wagner, et al. 2002).

### b. Additional barriers for disabled youth who are also *in foster care*

The transition from high school to adulthood is hard for any teen, and a smooth transition often requires the assistance of external support systems. For a variety of reasons, many youth in foster care do not have these supports making the transition to adulthood more difficult. Along with the lack of some of these support systems, youth with disabilities in foster care also face many other unique barriers. One study by Geenen and Powers (2005b) found that, in regards to foster care youth, as the number of youth foster placements increases, their grade point average and performance on state testing in math decreases. This same study also found that youth in foster care with disabilities:

- Had lower grade point averages than youth in general education
- Changed schools more frequently than youth in general and special education only
- Earned fewer credits towards graduation than youth in general education

- Had lower scores on state testing and were more likely to be exempted from testing than youth in general education and foster care only (pp. 1-2)

This study shows that both foster care and special education status alone place students at risk for academic failure. Students who happen to experience both a disability *and* foster care have even greater barriers to success. This is an important fact, because as Geenen and Powers pointed out in this study, "a large percentage of youth in foster care are receiving special education services (44%)." This means that nearly half of youth in foster care may experience the two-fold effects of both foster care and disabilities.

Many of the education problems facing foster care youth are partially, if not entirely, the result of placement instability and multiple school transfers. Problems resulting from this instability include: difficulty accumulating school credit, falling behind in academic skill areas, placement in classes already taken, delay in transfer of school records, difficulty being evaluated for special education placement, and the lack of a consistent adult figure to advocate for and mentor the child (Zeitlin, et al. 2004).

Findings by Courtney et al. (2005) illustrate the additional effects of these barriers. Among youth in their study, almost 63 percent were not enrolled in an education or training program and only 11 percent of those who had aged out were enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year college. Fewer than half (40%) were employed; 25 percent did not have enough to eat and one in seven (14%) had been homeless. More than three-quarters of the youth studied earned less than $5,000 annually, and 90 percent earned less than $10,000. Nearly half of the females were pregnant by age 19, and were twice as likely to have at least one child. Thirty-three percent had been arrested in the last year and 24 percent had spent at least one night in a correctional facility.

A similar study by Dworsky (2005) examined the self-sufficiency of former foster care youth who were at least 16 years old when they were discharged from Wisconsin's out-of-home care system. This study used administrative data from three sources: the human services reporting system, client assistance and re-employment support data, and unemployment insurance (UI) wage reporting system which reported quarterly-wage records for all employees in Wisconsin covered under the state's unemployment insurance laws. The sample consisted of 8,511 former foster care youth. The study found that nearly 17 percent of the former foster youth were recipients of public assistance and nearly a third were food stamp recipients in at least one of the eight quarters after their discharge. While earnings did increase over time, earnings remained very low for these youth with annual mean and median incomes well below the poverty level eight quarters after discharge.

Not only do foster care youth face obstacles to both education and employment, but as Kerker and Morrison (2006) stated, foster care youth also encounter a number of serious barriers to receiving needed mental health services. Those barriers fall into three main categories: child-serving systems, health care providers, and foster parents. The authors state, "although most children in foster care automatically qualify for Medicaid, modest provider reimbursements along with bureaucratic inefficiencies have resulted in few providers accepting this form of payment," (p. 140). Even if a practitioner does accept Medicaid, they are restricted in the number of sessions in which they are allowed to treat foster care children.

### c. Additional barriers for disabled youth in *secure juvenile confinement*

Committed youth are burdened with two additional issues, adjudication for at least one crime and commitment to a secure facility where the ability to leave the facility for any reason is often based on earned privileges. The transition experience for incarcerated youth often involves transitioning back to the community, where they then prepare for adulthood.

Bullis, Yovanoff & Havel (2004), and Bullis, & Yovanoff (2006), reporting on a study of 531 incarcerated youth in Oregon (disability prevalence = 58%) noted that youth with disabilities were 2.8 times more likely to return to the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) at six months post-release and 1.8 times more likely to return to OYA at 12 months following release compared to non-disabled youth.

### d. Predictors of successful transition for disabled youth in foster care

Indicators of familial socioeconomic status, such as income and education, appear to be significant predictors of employment outcomes for most youth. Families influence employment outcomes by providing youth with social networks, shaping youths' career goals, and by providing financial/material assistance. Reporting results from their study on material assistance from families, Schoeni and Ross (2004) found that over the entire seventeen-year period (ages eighteen to thirty-four) youth received on average $38,340 in material assistance from their parents. The exact amount varied greatly depending on parent's education and income levels. In fact, their study found that, "while youth in the bottom two quartiles received roughly $25,000 on average during the years eighteen to thirty-four, the top 25 percent received nearly three times as much, or $70,965," (p. 2). Unfortunately, youth with disabilities, youth in foster care, and youth in secure juvenile confinement typically do not come from families with a high socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status alone does not predict transition success for youth. Siegel and Gaylord-Ross (1991) created a four-factor model to explain other factors influencing job success among youth with learning disabilities. Their four factors included: job match and accommodation, social acceptance, work attitude, and special services. A study conducted to test this model found a range of correlations between these variables and job success; job match was significantly related ($p < 0.01$), while work attitude and special services were marginally related to employment success. Another study by Froquerean, et al. (1991) provided further insight into factors influencing successful transition for youth with disabilities. Analyzing postsecondary employment outcomes for a sample of 175 youth (75% male) diagnosed with learning disabilities in high school, the authors found that youth who exhibited high math ability (relative to the sample mean), employment during high school, and active parental participation in their education were more likely to experience employment success after high school.

Longitudinal data can be particularly useful in analyzing and describing factors that predict transition success for youth with disabilities in foster care. In their twenty-year longitudinal study, Raskind et al. (1999) examined employment outcomes for a sample of learning disabled youth (n=50) who attended the Frostig Center in Pasadena, CA between 1958 and 1965. Forty-one adults, aged 28-35 years old, participated in the study. The authors identified a set of "success attributes," that included:

- Realistic adaptation to life events, including
  - greater self awareness/self acceptance of the learning disability
  - proactivity
  - perseverance, and
  - emotional stability
- Appropriate goal setting
- Presence and use of effective support systems

The "success attributes" accounted for nearly 75 percent of the variance in the successful/unsuccessful variable. The "success attributes" were more powerful predictors of success than other measures including IQ, academic achievement, life stressors, age, gender, SES, and ethnicity. The success attributes were stable at both the 10-year and 20-year follow-up points, indicating stability across time. The authors concluded that, "the development of 'success attributes' in persons with LD should be given as much attention as efforts to improve academic skills," (p. 46).

In a different study, Courtney and Dworsky (2005) reported that, "A desire to attend college, closeness to at least one family member and general satisfaction with their experiences in out-of-home care increased the likelihood of employment or education for these young people," (p. 13).

The National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) (2005) discussing additional success factors for foster care youth stated:

- Successful transition, for youth ages 14 to 23 years, means that on leaving the care of the public child welfare system, a young person is pre-disposed to a life of meaning and purpose. The transition is characterized by:
  - Their connection to family, peers and caring adults
  - The completion of age appropriate education levels
  - A safe and stable place to live
  - An opportunity for career exploration and employment
  - An understanding of how to manage financial assets
  - Opportunities for social and civic engagement (p. 3).

A number of authors (Murray, 2003; Morrison & Cosden, 1997; Miller, 1996; Bernard, 1993) focused on evidence of resilience as a predictor for successful outcomes for transitioning young adults with disabilities. Murray (2003), citing Moskovitz (1983) stated:

- The concept of resilience suggests that some children, even those exposed to the most extreme and harsh conditions, can overcome adversity and have healthy adult outcomes (p. 18).

Murray (2003) listed a number of protective factors associated with resilient youth. Murray categorized these factors as:

- Characteristics of individuals:
  - Positive temperament
  - Internal locus of control
  - High self-esteem
  - Positive outlook on the future
  - Moderate to high intelligence

- Family factors:
  - Emotionally supportive and warm relationships with at least one parent
  - Effective parenting styles
- School factors:
  - Access to quality schools
  - Feeling a sense of school belonging
  - Good peer relationships
- Community factors:
  - Social support from adults
  - Involvement in other pro-social organizations

An individual's level of self-determination (i.e. having knowledge, skills, dispositions, and opportunities to pursue personal goals) also appears to influence post-school employment and level of employment success. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) found that post-school employment was significantly more likely for students with disabilities if they had higher levels of self-determination. Explaining the concept of "self-determination" more fully, Field et al. (1998) stated:

- Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the roles of successful adults in our society, (p. 10).

Summarizing the success predictors outlined above, a number of common themes emerge. Young adults with disabilities are more likely to experience successful transition when they exhibit or experience the following:

- Proactivity, perseverance, high self-esteem
- Relatively high intelligence/academic ability
- Positive and supportive school connections
- Supportive relationships with parents/caring adults
- Employment and career exploration during high school
- Positive social connections within their community

Some of these factors are more difficult for foster youth to exhibit or achieve. School, community, and meaningful adult connections can be difficult to establish in instances where youth experience multiple placement and/or school transfers.

### e. Predictors of successful transition for disabled youth in juvenile corrections

Baltodano, Mathur and Rutherford (2005) compared the definition of transition contained in the IDEA to Griller-Clark's (2004) definition of transition in the juvenile justice system. The IDEA definition is:

- A coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including post-

secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, (IDEA §300.29).

Griller-Clark (2004) supplied the following definition of transition:

- A coordinated set of activities for a juvenile offender, designed with an outcome-oriented process, which promotes successful movement from the community to a correctional setting, from one correctional setting to another, or from a correctional setting to post-incarceration activities including public or alternative education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, (p. 5).

Baltodano, Mathur and Rutherford (2005) emphasized the concept of "engagement" as an important predictor of successful transitions for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. The authors cited Todis, et al. (2001) who supplied the following definition of successful engagement:

- exhibiting three of four criteria: (a) currently employed, going to school, or both, (b) not re-arrested since leaving the facility, (c) not institutionalized for emotional or substance abuse problems since leaving the facility, and (d) report being satisfied with their current situations, (p. 121).

The authors reviewed 10 research studies that focused on contextual factors associated with successful and unsuccessful transitions, and identified seven factors associated with successful transitions:

- Pre-planning for transition
- A perceived internal control of like events
- Engagement in school and/or work
- Positive rather than negative peer influences
- High quality transition programming
- Addressing gender differences in programming, and
- Adult mentoring and support (p. 123)

Bullis, Yovanoff, and Havel (2004) identified two factors associated with successful transitions:

- Being engaged in school and/or work within six months of leaving a facility, and
- Receiving services from mental health and other social service agencies within six months after returning to the community (p. 80)

Reporting the results of a second study focused on using the same sample group, Bullis, & Yovanoff (2006) reported the following:

- Participants who received treatment for substance abuse prior to commitment to OYA were 2.7 times more likely to be employed than participants who did not receive substance abuse treatment
- Participants who completed career/vocational classes while in OYA were 3.9 times more likely to be employed, and
- Participants with a special education disability were 2.5 times less likely to be employed.

Describing the implications of this study to future research and practice the authors offered several recommendations:

- A need to focus on the transition of youth, women, and individuals with disabilities, in this study both groups have poorer employment outcomes than males without disabilities.
- Completion of substance abuse treatment and career vocational classes while incarcerated resulted in positive employment outcomes for sample youth.
- A need to focus on helping youth, especially youth with disabilities transition back to school or on to postsecondary education and providing appropriate social support services to youth returning to their communities.

## IV. Successful Programs/Promising Practices

### a. Disabled Youth

The body of research available on school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities suggests that future programs and policies aimed at helping disabled youth transition should "focus and embrace a more comprehensive curriculum of academic study, vocational experience, and life skills to ensure that more students with disabilities graduate from high school and transition to postsecondary education and employment," (Eisenman, 2003, p. 89).

Partee (2003) in a discussion of the five leading United States Youth Development Programs (Job Corps, National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, STRIVE, YouthBuild, and Youth Service and Conservation Corps) lists the following principals of effective youth employment programs:

- Implementation quality
- Caring, knowledgeable adults
- High standards and expectations
- Importance of community
- A holistic approach
- Youth as resources/community service and service-learning
- Work-based learning
- Long-term services/supports and follow-up.
-

She goes on to describe commonalities that occur across these programs:

- A broad set of strategies and services to address the needs of the target population
- Some form of on-site social service programs (case management, counseling, crisis intervention, information and referrals)
- Inclusion of work appreciation values, incorporation of work readiness skills and authentic work-based experiences
- A structure and environment to build participant confidence, skills and value as a productive individual and participating citizen
- An organizational structure in place for managing, replicating and guaranteeing adherence to the goals, objectives an standards of the program (pp. 2-3)

Koch (2000) outlined several of these practices/intervention strategies for transition-age youths with disabilities. The strategies she discusses are designed to promote four key areas:

- Career exploration and decision-making
- Career planning
- Job development and placement
- Career maintenance

Interventions designed to promote career exploration and decision-making included: informational interviews, job shadowing, situational assessment, trial work experiences, volunteer work and service learning programs, job analyses, and career portfolios. Career planning interventions include the use of career planners and career portfolios. Beyond career planning lies job development and placement interventions including: preparing for placement, developing a job search plan, the use of job clubs and job search organizers, and partnership-building activities. Once a job has been found, there are important career maintenance interventions including: provision of supported employment to assist individuals with job retention, career maintenance clubs, accommodation planning, and the use of a career portfolio to help individuals prepare for future career transitions.

Flexer and Simmons (1992) outlined the promising practice known as "supported employment." Supported employment focuses on meeting the needs of both the employee and the employer, using a marketing perspective that addresses the misconceptions about hiring a disabled person. Drake et al. (2003) examining supported employment services for mentally ill adults describe two approaches to supported employment, integrated and non-integrated services. The authors describe integrated employment services as a service model that combines clinical and vocational services placing clinicians and vocational specialists on a single multidisciplinary team. Non-integrated employment services consist of providing separate treatment and vocational services, with limited contact between mental health clinicians and vocational specialists. The authors' describe the strength of the integrated services approach thusly:

- Working together, vocational specialists and clinicians can understand and build on the strengths and interests of clients, but they can also incorporate clinical information that helps determine a successful job match and appropriate supports for a particular client (pp 55-56).

The authors reviewed the findings of eight clinical trials comparing integrated and non-integrated service models. Analyzing the results of three studies that compared integrated and non-integrated service models the authors' concluded:

- In each of the eight studies, the clients who received integrated services attained higher rates of employment, more hours of employment, and higher wages from competitive employment than clients who received non-integrated services. Typically the difference in employment rates was three or more times greater in the integrated service condition (p. 52).

Becker et al. (2006) examined twenty-six sites in seven states participating in the Johnson & Johnson – Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program. This program was a private-public-academic initiative designed to foster collaboration between state departments of mental health and vocational rehabilitation in implementing evidence-based supported employment services during January through June of 2004 in an attempt to determine what predicts success in supported employment outcomes. The authors' reported three key findings:

- First, mental health agencies with a higher percentage of supported employment staff per number of adults served in the community support program provided greater access to supported employment services.
- Second, the key components of supported employment as described in the Supported Employment Fidelity Scale[4] are related to work outcomes…. this study gives support to the importance of implementing the critical components of the practice rather than adapting the model to local conditions.
- Third, people with serious mental illness who are accessing supported employment services and living in areas with high unemployment rates are less likely to be working. … Nevertheless, the programs that followed more closely the critical components of supported employment had higher work outcomes that the programs that did not follow the critical components of supported employment practice (p. 309).

Focusing on the work site, Ohtake and Chadsey (2003) described job coaching strategies that utilize natural supports emphasizing leadership roles for coworkers and a more consulting or facilitator roles for job coaches. The authors describe a continuum of six types of facilitation strategies involving coworker and job coaches:

- Autonomous support by coworkers
- Suggested support from job coaches to coworkers
- Managed support of coworkers by job coaches
- Instructional support by coworkers
- Direct training by job coaches with consultation from coworkers
- Direct training by job coaches

Ohtake and Chadsey examined the type and frequency of problems exhibited by supported employees, the facilitation strategies used by job coaches, and strategies perceived as being needed by coworkers. Among the findings, the authors' reported, "…the job coaches provided the level of facilitation strategies coworkers perceived as needed to support the employee," (p. 224). Concluding, the authors' stated, "low-level support was associated with low frequency problems, but when the frequency of problems was high, the level of facilitation strategies was

[4] _____ (2003). Supported Employment Fidelity Scale – Implementation Questions. Downloaded from: http://download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/ken/pdf/toolkits/employment/12.SE_Fidelity1.pdf.

likely to be mixed in both the facilitation strategies provided and those perceived as being needed," (p. 226).

Reporting on work with youth with emotional behavior disorder (EBD), Carter and Lunsford (2005) described four areas important to secondary transition planning:

- Social skills training linked directly to students social skills deficits
- Vocational skills training focused on employment skills development and supported employment placements facilitating the connection between workplace expectations and skills learned at school
- Academic skills taught through a program integrated with vocational education
- Self-determination skills including setting realistic employment goals, evaluating progress toward self-selected goals, advocating for opportunities and supports and accepting responsibility for one's actions

Carter and Lunsford asserted the need to combine training in these skills with additional supports including community linkages, workplace supports, and student and family involvement in the transition planning process, (pp. 65-66).

### b. Youth in Foster Care

Research shows that youth who have left foster care are more likely than those in the general population not to finish high school, to be unemployed, and to be dependent on public assistance. Additionally, these youth are also associated with higher than average prevalence of mental health problems, drug use, and involvement with the criminal justice system (See: Courtney, M.E., Terao, S. and Bost, N. (2004) and Pecora, P.J. et al. (2005). A number of governmental and non-profit organizations have been created in response to these problems and concerns. Thus far, certain programs seem to be more successful than others. The hope is that these pilot programs, explained in more detail below, will demonstrate which types of programs work best to prepare youth with disabilities in foster care for the transition into adulthood.

Many current pilot programs have been created to help foster youth aging out of the foster care system to become self-sufficient members of society. For example, in September of 2004 the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) awarded grants to five states (California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Texas) to create programs designed to improve transitional education and employment outcomes for youth aging out of foster care. These states implemented programs in the following cities; Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, New York City, and Houston. More time is needed to see how successful these sites really are, but many helpful early observations could be made at the time of the most recent program evaluation. The evaluation and subsequent report made the following observations about the five test sites:

- Previous experience with at-risk youth and in employment services is an important factor in program success.
- Frequent and structured opportunities for ongoing communication among lead agencies, community partners, and youth are critical to creating an effective program.

- To retain youth in the program, sites must immediately and consistently engage youth in activities that move them closer toward meeting their personal goals.
- Youth involvement as advisors and staff help to create a youth-friendly program and positive attitudes toward the program and staff.
- An understanding of the community the program operates in is important to anticipating and resolving potential challenges and issues that may hinder a youth's progress in the program such as loss of housing, child care, or transportation.
- It is necessary to recognize the unique needs of current and former foster youth in designing a program that meets their complex needs.
- Garnering community involvement and employment partnerships now will help sustain the program in the future (p. 11).

Research has shown that part of the reason foster youth have poorer educational performance is because they often must transfer frequently from school to school due to changes in foster care placement. To combat this trend, certain agencies are striving to place children within their same community allowing them to remain in their original school. In other cases, funds are set aside to cover transportation costs so children living in foster care placements outside their school district can remain in their same school.

A study by Zetlin et al. (2004) discussed another promising program, the use of an Education Specialist (ES) to work as a liaison between the agency and the school. The ES worked with child welfare case workers to address educational concerns for children in foster care. The sample for this study consisted of 120 foster youth (60 control and 60 treatment/worked with ES). The study examined school performance data from these foster youth both prior to the intervention of the ES (1997-1998), and the year immediately following the intervention of the ES (1998-1999). The results of this study showed that advocacy by the education liaison led to positive results in terms of school performance of the foster youth.

While youth aging out of foster care experience many of the transitional problems described above, youth aging out of foster care that *also* have a disability may be at an even greater risk. Programs designed for these youth would have even more factors to consider including supports and accommodations for the youths' disabilities.